

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

THE RIGHT OF TRANSLATION IS RESERVED.]

[REGISTERED FOR TRANSMISSION ABROAD.]

No. 888.—VOL. XXXV.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING MAY 8, 1880.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[LOVE AND PRIDE.]

CECIL'S FORTUNE.

CHAPTER V.

LADY KATE'S WHIM.

Oh, I see thee old and formal,
Fitted to thy puny part,
With a little host of maxims
"Preaching down" a daughter's heart.

TENNISON.

Miss POMFRET's thin lips relaxed into a chilling little smile while her eyes gleamed, and she said:

"If the countess knew that I was willing to assist you in such a scheme as that of having your fortune told she would become my greatest enemy. And, oh! Lady Kate, the Countess of Belgrave is the cruellest enemy that man or woman can have, as many know to their cost. Lady Kate, you really must not I don't know what would become of me if you did, I should be ruined for life."

"It is not pleasant," Lady Kate answered, "to reflect that one has a mother who is really considered hard-hearted and cruel by so many people. I hope you are mistaken, Cissy; and now will you make haste with my hair. While you are arranging it we will lay our plans for this scheme."

"I daresay you think me weak and childish," said Lady Kate, presently, after Pomfret had been occupied in brushing out her hair and was preparing to plait it; "but yet among the fine and learned people whom I meet daily in my mother's rooms, and at afternoon teas,

and such places as I visit now before I make my entrance into the world of the London season, I have heard conversations which show me that the supernatural and the mystic have as many charms for the fine ladies and gentlemen of the nineteenth century as they had for the beaux and belles of the courts of the fifteenth and sixteenth Louis.

"People love still to read their future histories of themselves and of their friends, whether in the stars or in the dream-books of fortune-tellers, or at spiritual seances. People are much now as they were at Athens eighteen hundred years ago, when, as we read in the Holy Writ, they spent their time seeking or telling some new thing. Only last Wednesday I heard the Duchess of Berrylands at my mother's afternoon telling of this most wonderful man in Paris, who, the moment he has looked into your eyes, reads there aloud, as if from a book, all the history of your past life. Even your secret thoughts, which you had supposed known only to Heaven and your human heart, he tells aloud; and the duchess—who is in the strength and vigour of her intellectual life, a highly-talented, highly-speculative, deeply-read woman, if a little over forty, a handsome, energetic woman; without a weakness either mental or physical, one would say, to look at her—the duchess assured Lord Hope, who is an eminent man, you know—he is the Queen's advocate, and one of the most learned men in Europe—well, I heard her assure him that this Carnall—I think the name is hideous—well, that this Carnall had told her thoughts of her own which she had forgotten. And that she had seen a certain French countess blush and weep and entreat him to be silent when he

began to tell her of her former life in Brittany before her marriage, and of the young soldier whom she loved and supposed dead, but who was in truth at that moment alive in London. He was going to give her his address publicly, but the French lady entreated him to be silent. Now, this is a fact, and Lord Hope, that learned man, did not laugh the duchess to scorn, but said: "There were more wonders under the sun than were dreamt of in our philosophy."

"All I mean by this is that if these very wise and learned and thoroughly worldly people believe in these wonderful, unreasonable things, then, why is a mere girl less than half their age to be condemned as weak and ignorant if she too desires to know something of the future? This Carnall in Paris charges ten pounds for a consultation, and twenty pounds if he tells your fortune. Now, although I have beautiful jewellery and everything I can desire in the way of dresses, the countess never gives me any money, and my father gives me very little. I could no more, even if we were in Paris, afford to consult Carnall than I could accomplish a journey to the moon. But the old woman you speak of does not charge such great fees, does she?"

"No, Lady Kate, certainly not. Mrs. Topham, that is her name, does not charge more than half a guinea—for that sum she will undertake to tell you whom you will marry, and whether your married life shall be pleasant or painful; also she will tell you who loves you and who merely admires you in a selfish fashion. She will tell you the true disposition of the man you are to marry, if you will only show her a bit of his handwriting; or, better still, his photograph."

Lady Kate's bright grey eyes flashed as she glanced over towards her writing-table of carved oak. In that drawer she had placed last night the sketch of the face of Cecil Renfrew, which face had struck her as so interesting and full of power, that she had taken out a small pocket sketch-book, which it was her somewhat eccentric custom to carry, and had made a striking likeness of him upon the spot.

Lady Kate had no wish that Miss Pomfret should see that likeness, and she was very angry with herself for caring one atom whether Pomfret saw it or not; but, all the same, she was determined that her confidential maid should not see it, and that this wonderfully absurd Mrs. Topham should see it, and tell her something of the unknown who had rescued her the night before. She arose and walked across the room as soon as her magnificent hair was arranged, and then she said:

"I will finish my toilette myself, thank you, Pomfret."

The fact was Lady Kate was in a hurry to find the sketch which she had made of Cecil's face.

"But, Lady Kate, you have not told me when you will be ready to go with me to the fortune-teller."

"To-night, Cissy, when the earl and countess are gone to dinner at the Prime Minister's. I shall be left at home to play chess with my maiden aunt—my mother's sister—Miss Bruce who will arrive from Scotland to-day; but I must plead fatigue and pretend to retire to my room. You must hire a cab which must wait for us at the corner of the Square. I have just half-a-sovereign which I shall give to this wonderful Mrs. Topham. I suppose we shall not be absent more than an hour?"

"I can't tell, Lady Kate, because I have no time to go and make an appointment with Mrs. Topham; and so she may have many other people with her, and we may be obliged to wait for our turn."

"Anyhow," said Lady Kate, "we shall be home long before the countess."

"The countess wishes you to breakfast with her this morning, Lady Kate, in her own boudoir."

Lady Kate made a little gesture of impatience.

"It is to talk to me of my fiancée, the Marquis de St. Germaine," she said to herself. "I am not required to love him, but I must try and fascinate him. Oh, I wish I could become a milkmaid for a little while, or something else than a Lady Kate who must become a rich duchess."

As soon as Pomfret was gone Lady Kate took out the pencil sketch of Cecil Renfrew from the drawer of the desk, and as she looked at it she sighed, a long, soft, deep sigh; her warm heart was beating fast. While she looked in the face of Cecil a sort of thrill rushed through her veins.

"I wish—I wish that his face was not so noble and so sweet," she said to herself. "So much like a dream face that haunted me in the days of my childhood. Yes, I think, perhaps, I had better never see that man again; and if I do how cold and proud I must be to him—for it is my duty, and if the countess knew my thoughts she would send me to a lunatic asylum."

Lady Kate Ormond is seated in the elegant boudoir of her countess mother. She wears an exquisite morning robe of white cambric trimmed principally with the same material in bright blue; white lace is at her cuffs and round her throat.

She seems, with her fresh, rosebud face and golden hair, like some lovely flower, radiant and blooming. Her mother looks at her with a certain inward contentment; surely no blasé French marquis, desirous of wedding an English beauty of long descent, could take exception at so much sweetness, so much loveliness.

No, the worldly countess will yet see her child an elegant French duchesse, the wife of a

millionaire duke whose diamonds will outweigh those of royalty, a leader of the fashions of Europe, a voice in the politics of nations—for she knows that impulsive, girlish Kate is clever and an original thinker in her way. All that exuberance of spirit, that impetuous hatred of shams and conventionalities which the shrewd countess is so anxious now to crush and curb in her exquisite daughter, because she thinks they would distress the fastidious Frenchman whom she desires for a son-in-law.

The countess yet knows well it will make the young duchess more popular in society in years to come; but a simple maiden in her bloom and a young married duchess are two differently-placed individuals.

The breakfast service of the countess was of exquisitely chased antique silver, the Dresden china cups were costly as gems. The graceful countess, with her hair drawn back and powdered as it was her fancy to bear it, with a dainty white lace cap on the top of her haughty head, attired in a peignoir of crimson silk and white lace, looked like a queen of the old regime.

Lady Kate was hungry and ate heartily of toasted cake and cold pheasant. The countess had a more fastidious appetite—she drank her café au lait and sighed.

"Such an appetite as yours is worth a fortune," she said, with a smile. "When you have done I want to talk with you."

"I shall have demolished this toast in five minutes," said Lady Kate, "and then I am at your service."

And in five minutes Kate left the table and came and sat by her mother's side.

"Kate," said the countess, "I have had a letter from the marquis, he will be here to-night. You know that your father and myself are going to dine with Lord Hartbury, the Premier. We cannot decline that invite; the marquis will arrive about nine o'clock. Your Aunt Bruce will be here to do the honors and to introduce you."

"Yes, mamma, but would it not be better if I went early to my room and left the introduction till the morning when you will be present?"

"No," the countess answered, "I wish the marquis to engage you in conversation when you feel yourself perfectly unembarrassed, because I am sorry to say that in my presence you frequently assume a certain childish awkwardness which it is quite time you left behind you in the schoolroom; and your aunt, Ann Bruce, will not be a barrier to your natural flow of spirits. You were always very fond of your aunt Ann, she spoilt you in your childhood, it is true, in a most absurd manner; but you are at home with her, and I wish the marquis to see you when you are at home—when, in short, you are yourself."

It was a strange confession for a mother to make to her child, that that child was not at home in her presence. And it set Lady Kate thinking deeply; she felt sorry that there was so little trust, so little passionate affection between her mother and herself, and she wondered if she were to blame. But nature and reason both told her that there was little of what we understand by the word "Love" in the mother's soul for her or for anyone. Her mother was more like a strict governess to her than a tender parent; and when love is given grudgingly it is difficult to give much love in return.

"What are you thinking of, Kate?" asked the countess. "You do not seem delighted to meet the marquis, that is, as it should be. No girl with a dignified nature ever suffers herself to take any deep or absorbing interest in any man, whatever she must sacrifice to duty in becoming a wife for the sake of—"

The cold countess paused, and Kate's great, penetrating grey eyes were fixed upon her wonderingly.

"For the sake of social position, wealth, the world, her family duty, in short," continued Lady Belgrave; "but I should be truly sorry to see you give way to so vulgar a feeling as love, Kate, even for your husband."

"But, mother," cried Kate, passionately, "that seems to me monstrous, quite—quite monstrous. Love is Heaven-born. Without love it seems to me that the world would be a wilderness—that the business of everyday life could hardly go on."

"Stop," said the countess, "such discussions weary me—they are unbecoming. Such words from your lips are, in fact, terrible; they make me blush to think that a daughter of mine could utter them. Love, indeed! It is the theme of servant-maids, and milliners, and shopwomen. Ladies, Kate, never dream of such a thing, except in connection with the drama or a book of poems as mere pastime; as, in short, what it is—fiction, Kate, fiction. When you are older you will understand that what men mean by love is a very selfish passion, which often leads to their ruin and to that of their victims; and that women of sense and dignity hold aloof from even the thought of such a thing. Now, while I am upon the subject let me speak more plainly. The marquis, your future husband, is a brilliant, handsome, careless man of the world. Many young women have been weak and foolish enough to love him to their cost, for he will only marry a very highly-born and beautiful wife with a title in her own right, and you know that as there is no heir male you will be Countess of Belgrave when your father dies. Well, now, if you took it into your head to love this husband of yours in the foolish, extravagant way that poets dream of you would be a very miserable woman."

"What do you mean, mother?" Lady Kate asked.

Her cheeks were richest crimson; her eyes blazed with fire.

"I mean that if the Marquis de St. Germaine thinks you the prettiest and the most charming woman of his acquaintance, he will not think so for more than a year. Of course, my child, I know the world and you do not. Now you are to marry this wealthy, handsome, brilliant nobleman in the spirit of a highly placed woman of the world. You must not care one atom for his love; if you do you will be a jealous and miserable woman. No, you must make up your mind that in less than twelve months some new and sparkling actress will claim what he calls his heart. You will have nothing to do with that. No queen troubles herself about the amours of the 'king,' her husband. Your position as the Duchess of Montalbert will be almost as exalted as that of a queen. I want you to understand this, and to put the thought of such a ridiculous and absurd thing as love out of your thoughts for ever!"

"For ever!" Lady Kate repeated, and she looked down upon the flowery pattern of the carpet, and seemed to read there a history sad, intricate and full of a mysterious awe, for a voice in her heart kept crying out to her all the time that the teaching of the countess was false, and that all the time there were two great powers abroad among men—two powers which stalked through the earth—the one holding in her rosy hands flowers and palm branches, the other clutching between his skeleton fingers the scythe and the hour glass, two mighty powers strong for Time, though one shall be crushed in the end, and the other shall reign through eternity; two powers—Love and Death!

CHAPTER VI.

A WONDERFUL WITCH.

But now a pale blue light she saw,
It from a distance came;
She followed, till upon her sight
Burst forth a flood of flame.

LADY KATE knew very well that at one o'clock in the day the young man who had rescued her from the thievish crowd on the previous night would call to see the earl. The earl, meanwhile, had received from the countess an account of the whole transaction, and he understood that when the young man presented

himself he was expected to ask him if he could serve him in any way.

The countess was too haughty to endure with patience the idea that she was under obligations to anybody. Perhaps this young man, whose name she did not know, had actually saved her daughter's life, and therefore the earl was "to do the best he could for him." The earl was a man prematurely aged and completely under the control of his cold-hearted, strong-minded wife.

He therefore promised to "do what he could for Cecil" and then the countess, who had a sort of instinctive dread of her daughter again meeting the handsome, self-reliant stranger, took Lady Kate out shopping with her, and having once placed her on a seat close to a counter in Marshall and Snelgrove's, and mounted guard beside her, she gave herself up to the overturning of rare laces and embroidery for the space of two hours, while her tall powdered footmen made two more in the crowd of liveried servants who crowded round the door in Vere Street.

And Lady Kate cared nothing for laces and embroidery. Her restless soul was busied with dreams of various kinds, as many coloured as the embroidered flowers and silks that appeared to absorb the soul of the Countess of Belgrave. Lady Kate wore an exquisite toilette of light mauve trimmed with white lace. Her hat and parasol and gloves and plume were all of the same amethystine hue.

She looked like an incarnate poem. People in the shop, other customers not so highly born perchance, and moving in different spheres of fashion, were told that the young beauty had not yet come out; that she was to be presented at the next Drawing-room held by the Princess of Wales; that it was expected her beauty would then totally eclipse that of the then reigning queen of the season; that she was to marry the French millionaire, Marquis de St. Germaine, and would become eventually the Duchess de Montalbert.

Ah, how many young girls who only saw the earl's fair child from a distance envied her her superb loveliness and future brilliant career. And all the while Lady Kate was saying to her restless heart:

"It seems to me that, after all, the boon I am denied, that of loving and being loved, is still the greatest gift that Heaven can give to mortals."

And then she thought of the fortune-teller, and then of the marquis, the handsome, brilliant rake who was to become her husband, but whom she must not love because his love for her could never last, and she must learn to be quite independent of it from the first.

"What a horrible creed," she said to her own heart presently, and then a burning thrill shot through her whole frame, for she saw the marvellous dark eyes of Cecil fixed upon her with a look of hungry, ardent love, that she could not mistake.

Yes, instinct had guided him to the spot where he might be able once more to gaze on the face which now haunted him like the phantom of a murdered victim. Poor Cecil, he had not slept, he had tossed restless and feverish through the dark hours, thinking, mad with a hopeless longing for what common sense and reason told him could never be.

He had duly presented himself at the mansion in Grosvenor Square at the time appointed, and being all the time devoured by a great hungry longing to behold once more the beauty of Lady Kate, he had asked to see the earl, and had sent in his card with the name Cecil Renfrew. He had been admitted, and had seen the old earl in his library, and had been thanked and asked what he desired, and had answered:

"Some position in which he might serve the Earl of Belgrave."

The old nobleman had looked at him in amazement.

"But you are well bred—a gentleman," he had said.

"Yes, but a poor one. I am the grandson of Sir Roderick Renfrew; I have been educated at

Heidelberg; I am a good linguist. Could you find me a position as tutor?"

The earl had jingled his watch chain and promised to consult the countess, and so the interview ended. And now Cecil had found his way into the large drapery establishment where the noblewomen of England purchase their purple and fine linen, and he is looking at Kate, and Kate is looking at him.

Ah! how was it that all the cold-wise maxims of the countess mother seemed to be scattered to the four winds of Heaven when once Lady Kate saw that dark face of Cecil Renfrew? He did not dare to raise his hat, even when his flashing black eyes met those grey, large, penetrating eyes of the Lady Kate, because he met also the cold, blue eyes of the Countess of Belgrave fixed upon him in a haughty amaze, impossible to describe in words.

The proud and angry countess spoke not a word. Cecil walked to another counter and occupied himself in the purchase of gloves; and soon afterwards the countess decided, in a hurry, upon a piece of embroidery, which was forthwith carried out to her carriage, which the footman called, and Lady Kate left the shop, her head in a whirl, her heart beating faster than it had ever beaten before in her life. When they were seated in the carriage the countess said to her daughter:

"The man who was so good to us last night when the Euphrate Theatre took fire walked actually just now into Marshall and Snelgrove's and absolutely looked at us as if he expected us to recognise him. The presumption of some people is extraordinary."

Lady Kate looked resolutely out of the window, so that her mother should not see the changes on her fair face. How was it that she felt so bitterly angry with the countess? How was it that her heart (was it her heart?)—anyhow, some importunate voice in her soul kept on crying out that the stranger (the reader must recollect that Cecil had not given his card to the ladies) was noble in mind and soul; aye, and in mien and bearing, as the highest-born and most fastidiously-reared aristocrat in all the *crème de la crème* of what is called English society—a very demigod among men, said this voice in her soul.

She made no answer to her mother's remarks. Instinct warned her to bury the secret of this strong and subtle admiration in the deepest depth of her heart.

"He will never be anything to me but a memory," she said to herself; "but, oh, I wish I knew who he was."

Aunt Anne and beautiful Kate have dined, and now they are lounging before the fire in the long drawing-room of the Grosvenor Square mansion. It is a noble room: the fine windows are draped in amber satin; the chairs and couches of same are covered in a lovely-patterned chintz; there are statues gleaming white in shadowy corners, and carved cabinets loaded with priceless china and bronze, and panels with portraits of the young beauty's ancestors and ancestresses, and all of these thrown into a luminous yet soft relief by the light of many wax candles placed here and there on silver branches in the walls.

Lady Kate was simply attired in black silk, a white ruff at her throat; a heavy golden bracelet on her arm was her only adornment, save a bunch of purple violets at her breast.

Miss Bruce was a middle-aged lady, the very antipodes of her haughty sister, the countess. She was stout, black-haired, with a pale skin, mild grey-blue eyes, a placid smile, and a double chin. She possessed a caressing, almost submissive, manner.

Every mortal child that came in her way loved Miss Anne Bruce. Lady Kate had loved her when Lady Kate was a little girl, and now that she was a grown maiden she loved her still, and she knew that she could "manage her" completely. Miss Bruce was examining with great delight a book of engravings. Lady Kate watched her with a half smile.

"Aunt," she said, suddenly, going over to her. "Well, my darling."

"I feel tired. I wish you would not be offended if I go to bed."

Miss Bruce put the book down in alarm.

"My dear child, are you ill? You look charming; and I thought you enjoyed your dinner. I have travelled up from Scotland, as you know, and I feel tired, but you—"

"Well, but I had such a terrible fright last night, aunty. Fancy the theatre being on fire, enough to upset anybody's nerves," said the girl, turning away her blushing face so that aunty should not see the smiles that would lurk at the corners of the sweet mouth. "Would you be offended, aunty, if I went to bed?"

"No, my darling. But is not the marquis, the French marquis, coming to-night? I am afraid that I have forgotten a great deal of my French, and what little I have is now rusty for want of use."

"That won't matter at all, aunty, the marquis is an accomplished linguist and speaks English perfectly, so that you will be able to enter into the most interesting conversations with him."

"Ah, I see how it is," Miss Bruce said, with a shake of her head. "You are shy; you feel nervous; you wish to escape. Well, my dear, go to your room; I will make your excuses to the marquis."

"You dear, kind aunty!" cried Lady Kate.

She crossed over to the elder lady and kissed her affectionately. Afterwards our rather volatile and impetuous heroine went to her own room. A large fire burnt in the wide grate. Pomfret stood close to it holding a very long fur cloak in her hands.

Pomfret herself was equipped for the expedition to the fortune-teller's in a long black cloak and a close black straw bonnet that shaded her vivacious, rather cunning young face very much.

"Make haste, Lady Kate!" cried Pomfret. "Heaven alone knows what time we shall reach Mrs. Topham's. The cab has been waiting for nearly an hour at the corner of the square. Here are your boots. Let me draw them on for you. Now for the cloak, and you must wear this black velvet hat and thick black veil. Come along, Lady Kate; follow me down the back staircase; we must cross the court and get out into the mews. Don't be afraid; you must not be seen leaving the house by the front door; you might meet the marquis on the steps."

This was true, so Lady Kate, who was resolute and not dismayed by trifles when she had an object in view, followed her maid down the back stairs and across the courtyard to the mews. From thence they emerged into the square, and were not long in finding the cab that was waiting for them and taking their places inside.

It would have seemed that Mrs. Topham, the fortune-teller, was not a very widely known prophetess, else would she most assuredly have dwelt in a more aristocratic quarter, but it appeared that the modern witch inhabited a portion of a house in Greek Street, Soho.

"Where is Greek Street, Soho?" asked Lady Kate. "Not a nice place, is it?"

"It is a dingy and dirty street leading out of the square called Soho," replied Pomfret.

"Dear me," said Lady Kate, "I wish she lived in a pleasanter place. After last night's experience I have a horror of low people. I hope no thieves will stop us as we get out of the cab."

Pomfret laughed.

"How do you suppose, Lady Kate, that young women who are not earl's daughters, and who always have to go on foot, contrive to escape being murdered and robbed?"

There was a certain bitterness in the tone of Pomfret which set Lady Kate wondering.

"Can I have offended her in any way?" she asked herself. "And does she in truth dislike me in her heart? I have sometimes fancied so lately; and yet how kind I have been to her."

I wonder who Pomfret is, and what her history has been. I can never hear anything more of her antecedents than that she was brought up in an obscure village in Wales by a maiden aunt. Pomfret," said Lady Kate, gently, "have I offended you?"

"Oh, dear no, my dear young lady," the maid answered, with a laugh. "Whatever should make you fancy such a thing?"

But there was a hollowness in the laugh of Pomfret that echoed rather dismally in Kate's ears. She felt at that moment that she was right, and that for some mysterious reason Pomfret hated her mortally. At last the cab stopped; the man descended and opened the door.

"This is number nine," he said, gruffly.

Pomfret got out and held her hand out to Lady Kate. They both stood shivering on the pavement. The night had turned very cold. An east wind was moaning at the street corners; the fog was rising; rain—a chilling, miserable rain was beginning to fall.

"Am I to wait?" asked the man, when Pomfret had paid him.

"No," said Pomfret, promptly. "No, we will call a cab for ourselves when we come out."

"But we may not meet one, and it is raining. Oh, yes, wait for us, wait for us!" cried Lady Kate, with emphasis.

"Excuse me," Pomfret said, bluntly. Then to the man: "Don't wait; we may be here for hours."

She spoke with a stern, commanding determination that astonished Lady Kate. The cabman drove away.

"What do you mean by this, Pomfret?" asked Lady Kate, haughtily.

"I mean, Lady Kate, that we have not money enough between us to pay a cabman for waiting in the rain for hours!"

"For hours! What do you mean? I will not be detained in a dreadful place like this for hours, and I begin to feel quite sorry that I came here; I don't like your manner, Pomfret, at all."

"You have your remedy, Lady Kate," the young woman answered, coldly. "You have but to complain to the countess, and she will dismiss me and give me a bad character, and prevent my obtaining another place, and in short ruin me; but that sort of conduct is the pastime of fine ladies."

"You are unjust, Pomfret. I hate injustice."

"So do I, Lady Kate."

Oh, the strange, cold cutting emphasis which Pomfret gave to those words. The sentence seemed to pierce the soul of Kate like a sharp dagger, and yet the poor child was utterly innocent of having given the peculiar young person any offence.

While she stood in a sort of bewilderment Miss Pomfret pulled the bell of the house, and a shrill, reverberating sound came to the ears of mistress and maid. Another instant and the door fell back, disclosing a long narrow passage dimly lighted by a feebly burning lamp at the further end, but there was not a creature in sight. The door had been opened by means of some machinery which worked from a distant part of the house.

Lady Kate followed Pomfret into the passage, and the door closed behind them with a loud bang. Lady Kate shuddered a little, but the nervous feeling was only momentary. It passed away, and she held up her head proudly.

"Lead on," she said, a little haughtily to Pomfret. "I suppose you know your way in this house?"

Pomfret walked on in silence. What strange passions of jealousy and bitter hatred against her beautiful, unconscious and gentle young lady raged in her heart might have been read at that moment upon her countenance had there been an opportunity for studying it, and she muttered between her close shut, even, white teeth words like these:

"She has always played the amiable until now, and I have striven to rouse her into anger

so that I might justify my deadly hatred to myself, and now—now she has ordered me as if I were a dog—me, me! Ah, she shall repent; she shall bite the dust—the dust!"

"The dust!" echoed Lady Kate with a merry laugh, for her sweet temper was now restored, and her quick ears had caught the last words. "Yes, it is a terribly dusty place. Pomfret, hold up your skirts as I hold up mine. Why, where are we?"

She asked the question in some alarm. Pomfret had pushed open a door in the wall, then laying her hand on Lady Kate's shoulder, she gently but firmly pushed her into a room. She herself followed. The door closed behind them with a yet louder noise than had the entrance door. Lady Kate found herself in total darkness.

"What does this mean, Pomfret?" Lady Kate asked. "Where are we?"

"In the throne-room of the witch," Pomfret answered, with a bitter laugh. "She will show herself presently."

At that moment Lady Kate perceived a blue light in the far distance.

"Go on, fear nothing," said the voice of Pomfret in her ear.

The hand of her maid still clutched Kate's shoulder—clutched it imperiously. She felt herself pushed forward, and like one in some strange and horrible dream she obeyed, and was driven close to the flame which grew all at once bright and large, and then Kate saw what looked like a fire burning in a low grate. Close to it sat the figure of a woman apparently bowed with age. She was enveloped in a black cloak.

"Mother Shipton!" cried Miss Pomfret, at the pitch of her rather shrill voice, "we all know that you discovered the secret of the elixir of life long centuries ago, and so you have lived on to the age of four hundred years, or is it five?"

"Five hundred years!" answered an unearthly voice.

"You call yourself Mrs. Topham," pursued Miss Pomfret; "but in truth you are Mother Shipton, and you tell us

That the world to us and shall come,
In eighteen hundred and eighty-one."

A hideous yell of laughter from the crone before the fire. Then she arose, advanced, threw back her hood, and turned a most frightful face towards Lady Kate.

(To be Continued.)

HINDOO WOMEN.

THE Hindoo women, when young, are delicate and beautiful, so far as we can reconcile beauty with olive complexion. They are finely proportioned, their limbs small, their features soft and regular, and their eyes bright and languishing, but the bloom of beauty soon decays, and also make rapid progress before they have seen thirty years. This may be accounted for from the heat of the climate and the customs of the country, as they are often mothers at twelve years of age.

No woman can be more attentive to cleanliness than the Hindoos; they take every method to render their person delicate, soft and attractive. Their dress is peculiarly becoming, consisting of a long piece of silk, or cotton, tied around the waist, or hanging in a graceful manner to the feet; it is afterwards brought over the body in negligent folds; under this they cover the bosom with a short waistcoat of satin, but wear no linen. Their long black hair is adorned with jewels and wreaths of flowers; their ears are bored in many places, and loaded with pearls; a variety of gold chains, strings of pearls, and precious stones, fall from the neck over the bosom, and the arms are covered with bracelets from the wrist to the elbow.

They have also gold and silver chains round the ankles, and an abundance of rings on their fingers and toes; among those on the fingers is

frequently a small mirror. I think the richer the dress the less becoming it appears, and a Hindoo woman of distinction always seems to be overloaded with finery; while village nymphs, with fewer ornaments, but in the same elegant drapery, are more captivating—although there are very few women, even the lowest families, who have not some jewels at their marriage.

In these external decorations consists the pride and pleasure of these uninstructed females; for very few, even the best families, know how to read or write, or are capable of intellectual enjoyment. We learn from Homer that the women in ancient Greece always kept in a retired part of the house, employed in embroidery or other feminine occupations; and at this day the Indian women are never seen by those who visit the master of the family. They know but little of the world, and are not permitted to eat with their husband or brother, nor to associate with other men.

A STRATAGEM.

THE parson from the pulpit spoke,
With fervent zeal and earnest stroke;
His solemn voice rang through the porch,

And filled the glade about the church.
The congregation dreamily
Dozed over the words with which he
Drew lessons of wisdom deep for each,
Who came to hear him duly preach.
The heated air, that sultry day,
Gave weight to all the preacher's say,
That fell upon the listening throng
Like the low sound of evening song,
Lulling the weary heart to rest,
Filling with peace the troubled breast,
Until within that church not one
Heard words from fervid parson's tongue,

But slept, like virgins at the door,
Whose light had died for evermore;
And though the preacher's strain went on,
Naught save low moans came from that throng.

The preacher paused. O'er dell and hill
Deep silence reigned, and all was still.
In accents broad, with wakened ire,
He screamed aloud, "Fire! Fire! Fire!"

Fire!
Then to their feet that throng up-
sprang,

The women shrieked, and every man
Cried, "Dominie, where is the fire?"
From youthful ones to grey-haired sirs,
The preacher's eyes flashed anger keen,
While the people stood with frightened mien,
And shrunk beneath the parson's eye,
When he with fervour out did cry:
"There is a fire of burning coals
"In hell, ye lazy, drowsy souls!"

W. N.

MISCELLANEOUS.

MR. FARNIE'S English version of "Fa Fille de Tambour Major" has been produced at the Alhambra with marked success.

BRUDET, the Roman aeronaut, was to have ascended his balloon on horseback, but that not being allowed by the authorities, he mounted it on a trapeze. And on the trapeze he was seen until the balloon disappeared from sight among the clouds. Balloon and man, however, finally descended safely, close to the Pincio Promenade.

SAID the mistress of a cigar shop to a young Bohemian journalist:—"This is the sixth time that you have been here without saying a word about the money you owe me!" "Ah, madam," said the clever journalist, "when one sees you, they forget everything!"



[CAUGHT IN A TRAP.]

LOST THROUGH GOLD; OR, A BEAUTIFUL SINNER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Frank Bertram's Wife," "Strong Temptation," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TWO TELEGRAMS.

But the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.
PROVERBS.

ALMOST by mutual consent the two friends avoided the subject of George Arnold for the rest of that day. Dorothea seemed to have forgotten her depression of the morning. She talked cheerfully of her trip to Rome; she smiled more than once in the bright, girlish way that had fascinated Alice at The Grange.

"I have never been abroad in my life," she confessed, "and expect I shall enjoy it very much."

"But your home?" suggested Alice. "The Grange will seem deserted without its mistress."

"I don't care for anyone in the place," said Dorothea, almost facetiously. "I love The Grange dearly, Alice, but I should love it all the more if only I could live there without having my time and attention claimed by every fussy old lady who chooses to call on me."

"I have often wondered," returned her friend, "how you ever came to settle in Keston. You seem so fitted for bright society instead of being alone in a little country village."

A suspicious moisture dimmed Dorothea's clear eyes.

"My life had been so hard until I married,

Alice, that I thought I should like to rest. I longed for a home, and I had made up my mind I would never have any home that was not entirely my own, and so I bought The Grange, or rather Mr. Hardy bought it for me."

"He could not have chosen you a fairer home. I never saw a place I liked so well."

Dorothea sighed.

"It is lovely, but it is almost too quiet. I had been so used to an active life. I had no idea of what my existence would be tied down in a little village with nothing to do but to amuse myself; and yet I was very happy, Alice."

She spoke so decidedly in the past tense, that Miss Tracy looked up surprised.

"And you will be happy there again, Dora, when you forget all the trouble I have brought upon you."

Dorothea shook her head.

"I don't mind telling you, Alice. I wouldn't mention it to anyone else in the world. I don't think I shall ever live at Keston again."

Alice opened her blue eyes in astonishment. Mrs. Hardy went on calmly, so calmly that her friend knew it was on no sudden impulse she spoke, but in simple earnest.

"You see, Alice, I never thought of living alone at The Grange. Such an idea never came into my head."

"You had your aunt."

"Yes, she loved the country. I wanted her to have a happy, easeful home. I think I prized The Grange for her sake most."

"But she will come back to you some day?"

"I think not. She has gone to her only son; she loves him better even than she loves me. Owing to his wife's jealousy of her she has only seen very little of him lately, so now she will want to make up for lost time by living with him entirely, as far as aunt is concerned, my solitude at The Grange would be solitude indeed."

Alice stole her hand into Dora's. For the first

time in all their friendship she felt herself the more favoured of the two; for the first time it was her privilege to give, not to receive sympathy. Whatever were her own troubles, she had one joy unknown to Dorothea.

A good man loved her as his own life, and she loved him back again. Adverse circumstances might prevent her from becoming George Arnold's wife, might even separate them for a time; but nothing would rob her of the consciousness of being loved.

"You will be married some day," said Dorothea, turning her clear eyes on her friend. "When you are at your happiest I shall be growing old and cross and ugly."

"I can't fancy you growing old."

Dorothea shivered.

"It must be terrible growing old alone, unloved, uncared for, with no one to be sorry for you."

"Don't talk of such dreary things," urged her friend, caressingly.

"I shall never take another companion," said Mrs. Hardy, just touching the girl's golden hair with her thin, white hand; "it would not be fair to the young lady. I should be always contrasting her with you, and comparisons are odious."

"Have you any friends in Keston, Dora? I don't mean acquaintances. I know you have heaps of them. I mean real friends."

"Not one. I know numbers of people, but I am hard to please. I honestly think I liked the Miss Cardens, poor old things, as well as anyone in Keston. They were very old-fashioned and rather trying in the fuss they made over Ella; but they were very kind-hearted. I liked them very much. However generously Susan drowned your pet projects with cold water to your face, you might feel quite certain she was not running them down and you with them behind your back. Oh yes, there was something very genuine about those old maids, poor things!"

Alice looked up as though she would have liked to ask in what it consisted.

"I liked Miss Jemima best," she said, a little absently.

"Poor Jemima. Who would have thought she could go off like that?"

"You don't mean to say she's dead?" cried Alice.

"Why she was not old."

"Nor quite young, and she died, people say, of a disease peculiar to age. The doctor who attended her gave it as his opinion that Miss Jemima died because there was nothing in the world able to tempt her into wishing to live."

"What a very strange verdict. And where are the others?"

"Susan has taken Ella abroad. We may fall in with them on our travels (I can't say I feel at all anxious to), and Arty is in London, I believe; but I really know nothing. The little scandal I have just told you was picked up by stealth."

The morning after this conversation, when Alice came downstairs, she found Mrs. Hardy eagerly reading one of those pink despatches which cause such strange anxiety in so many homes. Miss Tracy looked up quickly as she saw her hostess busy, and strolled away to the fireplace.

She had not long to wait. In another moment Dorothea put the note she had been reading into her hands. It was very short and simple; its meaning was very plain; the summons it contained very imperative.

"The Rev. William Stone, Ronoy, near Brussels, to Mrs. Hardy, the Royal James, Halsted. My mother is dangerously ill. Come at once."

This was the message which had blanched Dorothea's cheek and given her face a worn, anxious look. The telegram had been sent on from Halsted. Already precious time had been lost.

"I cannot eat any breakfast," she said, impatiently, as the attendant brought in the savory meal. "Alice, I must start by the next train. I am very sorry to leave you, but I have no choice; I must go to my aunt."

"Take me too," pleaded Alice; "I may be of some use; I understand illness."

"I dare not take you," answered Dorothea; "the illness may be infectious, and then Mr. Arnold would not thank me for exposing you to it."

"My danger would be no greater than yours."

"But I am my own, and you belong to someone else; that makes such a difference."

Alice was silent. Inexpressibly she dreaded being left alone, yet she could not be selfish enough to attempt to keep Dorothea from her aunt.

"You are quite safe now," said Dorothea, tenderly; "you are in no more danger than if the 'Aston Mystery' had never been. The law directs that no prisoner be tried twice for the same offence, so that if they had proof upon proof that you killed your cousin no harm could come to you."

"What shall I do, Dora?" asked Alice, gently. "Shall I wait for you here, or if there is no chance of infection will you let me come on to you?"

"I will think about it and telegraph from London. At present it seems to me this is the safest place for you. At this hotel they know everything. I think they took my view of the 'Aston Mystery'; if you went among strangers it might be different."

After the pretence of breakfast there were a few minutes of hurried packing, then Mrs. Hardy sent for the mistress of the hotel and commended Miss Tracy specially to her care during her absence. The woman promised readily to see after the young lady. From the first she had taken a strange interest in Dorothea, and she was glad to be able to do anything to oblige her.

Overcoming her dread of being seen in the public streets, Alice drove with Dorothea to the station. They talked but little by the way. Dora was strangely upset, and Alice had

enough to do to hide from her friend her sorrow at being left alone. Only when they stood on the platform did it occur to Mrs. Hardy to say to her friend:

"Remember, dear, if I am detained, or if you are not comfortable, you have Duke Hardy's address. Don't scruple to go or write to him if you want a friend."

"I think Mr. Hardy has done enough for me already."

"He will not mind doing more; he is a staunch friend when he is a friend at all, and you are one of his special favourites, Alice."

"I wish you didn't hate him so," said Alice, impulsively. "I think Mr. Hardy would like to be your friend if only you would let him, Dora."

The train came steaming up. Dorothea easily evaded a reply. She kissed Alice warmly, bade her take care of herself and write to her often, then there was a shrill whistle and a great ringing of bells. A moment later Alice Tracy stood alone on the platform, and the train had whirled her friend rapidly out of sight.

It was a sad, long drive back to the hotel. Although she was no coward; although, as Dora had told her, she could never again be tried on suspicion of Lord Aston's murder, yet Alice felt miserably ill at ease. Through the last two months she had leant so completely on Dora that she was more like a young tree without support than the girl who at Aston Manor had been obliged to act on her own resources.

Alice had nothing to complain of at the hotel. Every servant knew perfectly well who she was and what she had been accused of, but not one with whom she came in contact failed to treat her with the respect due to a lady.

But no care, no politeness could prevent the hours of that March day from dragging heavily to Alice Tracy. The space between dinner and tea seemed double its usual length; the interval between tea and supper was simply interminable, and Alice finally lighted herself a candle and retired to rest at the premature hour of half-past nine, wishing from the bottom of her heart Mrs. Stone had not fixed upon the present time to be ill and require her niece's kind companionship, and also just as intensely that infection or no infection she had clung bravely to Dorothea, and refused to be left behind.

It was hours before she went to sleep. When she awoke the spring sun was pouring into the room, announcing to the sleeper as plainly as words could speak that it was time to get up. The brightness of the day banished the gloomy thoughts that had so disturbed Alice the night before. She went down to breakfast in the best of spirits. To her surprise a telegram was on the table addressed to herself.

"DOROTHEA HARDY, Charing Cross Hotel" to Alice Tracy, Edinburgh. Too late for my going to Brussels to be of any use. I am going straight home. Come up by the same train I left by yesterday, and one of the servants shall meet you at King's Cross."

It was very unlike Dora's style, but as Alice knew, telegrams are always abrupt. She never doubted this one was sent by her friend; she understood from it that Mrs. Stone was dead, and her niece in her sorrowful surprise had gone straight to her own country home, there to hide her grief in solitude.

The part of the message which most puzzled Alice was that a servant would meet her at King's Cross. She had travelled alone before. Surely after making the long journey from Scotland to London she could manage the trifling one from London to Bromley. The train arrived at midnight. Most of the servants at The Grange were young; it seemed the strangest arrangement imaginable.

No thought of opposing it ever came to Alice Tracy. She rang for the landlady, and explaining the position to her, packed up her few possessions, and was driven to the railway station in ample time for the train specified. She had a rapid and very pleasant journey to London,

and although she sympathised with her friend's sorrow, she was very glad that she was so soon to meet Dorothea again.

As the train glided into the terminus she wondered what was her next plan. To go on to Keston would be impossible. Surely it would be better to put up at an hotel till the morning. She had not long to wait. A trim, superior-looking servant came to the carriage door.

"My mistress sent me, miss," after she had duly inquired if Alice were Miss Tracy. "She thought you would not like to go to an hotel alone."

"Is Mrs. Hardy pretty well?" asked Alice, eagerly. "How does she bear the news of Mrs. Stone's death?"

"It is a hard blow to her, miss. They were more like mother and daughter than aunt and niece always."

They were driving away now in a cab. A sudden thought came to Alice what position her companion could hold at The Grange. She could be nothing less than an upper servant, and Alice thought she had seen all these.

"I do not remember your face at all," she said, wonderingly. "I thought I had seen all the household at The Grange."

"I don't live at The Grange always, miss. My sister, Mrs. Bill, is housekeeper there, and I generally stay with her when the mistress is away. Mrs. Hardy sent me to meet you because the regular servants were over young and quite strangers in London."

So that was explained. Alice did not like the woman, despite her civility and her relationship to the kind old housekeeper. There was upon her the uncomfortable feeling that she had known this woman before. She tried in vain to conquer the conviction; it was too strong for her.

Certainly her prejudice seemed unfounded. The servant waited on her with every mark of respect, unpacked the few necessary articles of toilette she would require for the night, brushed out her golden hair, and did everything in her power to make her comfortable.

But first impressions are very powerful. In spite of all her kindness Alice was very glad when the door closed on her. Five minutes afterwards she was asleep, but her sleep was troubled and uneasy. In all her dreams she saw Lady Aston standing over her with a cruel smile on her beautiful face.

It was ten o'clock in the day when she awoke, and the maid stood before her with a tray, on which was arranged a dainty breakfast. Alice despatched the coffee and new-laid egg and was soon ready to get up. Soon after eleven they were on their journey.

"It is very strange," said Miss Tracy, as they entered a first-class carriage at Ludgate Hill; "I got up very late, and yet I am so sleepy I can hardly keep my eyes open."

"But think of your journey yesterday, miss," said her companion, respectfully; "it's no wonder you're a little tired."

"A little tired!" It was more than that. Never in her whole life had Alice felt anything like the overpowering drowsiness which was stealing over her now. She fought against it bravely, but in vain. Long before they reached Bromley her head had fallen back, and she was utterly unconscious of all passing around her.

When Alice came to herself she was sitting in a large, pleasantly furnished drawing-room with her late fellow traveller and a tall, masculine-looking lady dressed in black. The room was one she had never been in before; of that she was quite sure.

She put her hand to her head and tried to collect her thoughts. Everything felt in confusion. She was as one in a maze. How did she come there? Who were these two women? Where was Dorothea? What did it all mean? Such questions as these rushed rapidly through her brain, and it was long before she could recall sufficient memory to solve them. At last slowly it came back to her—the hurried journey

from Scotland, the night at the hotel, and the starting for Bromley, her own sleepiness.

How long was that ago? It had been morning—now it was afternoon—then would it be the same day. The doubt was soon solved—on the centre table stood a pretty contrivance for telling the date of the month; it pointed to the sixteenth of March, only four days since her trial. Her two companions noted the direction of her eyes.

"She is awake now, I think," said the one who had met Alice at King's Cross.

Alice sat spellbound, unable to speak—her tongue seemed unable to do her bidding. The lady in black came up to her.

"I am glad to see you, my dear; I hope we shall be able to make you comfortable."

The sound of the clear, hard voice seemed to break the spell. Alice started to her feet.

"There is some mistake," she cried, wildly. "Madam, what house is this? Where am I?"

"You are at Sunnyside, my dear; and we will do our best to make you at home."

"I can't stop here," returned Miss Tracy, resolutely. "I must continue my journey. I am expected at Keston to-night."

"That is the story she always tells," put in the second woman. "She must go to Keston at once, she says she has a friend there waiting for her; on every other point she is as sane as you or I."

"As sane as you or I," those words told a frightful tale to Alice: this was a madhouse.

"Indeed, indeed!" she cried, imploringly, "I am not mad. I don't know who she is," pointing to the person who had accompanied her from London. "There is some terrible mistake. Let me go to Dora."

"No one thinks you are mad," repeated the lady in black, reassuringly. "You only require a little care and attention. This is not a madhouse, it is a house for people who are not quite strong. I have two or three other young people, and I am sure they will tell you they like being at Mrs. Deane's very much."

"It is all a mistake," cried Alice. "I never saw this woman till yesterday; she was sent to meet me at the station, and she brought me here."

"Mrs. Collins," said the lady of the house, "I think you had better go—you only excite her. Assure the countess we will do all in our power for her sister."

"The countess?" gasped Alice. "Do you mean Lady Aston?"

But no answer came. Mrs. Deane was busy conferring with her visitor. Alice spoke again:

"Will you tell me by whose authority I have been brought here?"

"Hush," said Mrs. Deane, laying one hand on her shoulder, "do not make such a noise; you will be very happy at Sunnyside, and when you are better you shall go home again."

The woman who had been called Mrs. Collins rose to take her departure.

"My lady will be glad to hear you are in safe keeping, miss," she observed, as she passed Alice. "You will remember, Mrs. Deane, her ladyship's instructions are that Miss Vavasour receives no visitors and writes no letters."

Leaving Alice Tracy with a look of agonised entreaty in her blue eyes, having voluntarily helped to inter a beautiful girl in a living prison, the maid left Sunnyside; and, after a seven miles' drive to the nearest station, returned to London and made her way to a small private hotel in Portman Street.

On the sofa in a small upper sitting-room, with a feverish glitter in her black eyes, and a flush too bright for that of health upon her cheeks, lay Sybil. Countess Dowager of Aston.

It was not so very long, since she held that private interview with George Arnold, but she was terribly changed since then. She was beautiful still, hers was a face which would never lose its loveliness, but an experienced eye could read that disease had commenced its work upon her frame; her passions were eating away her life.

She had sold herself for gold, had put away all thought of happiness for gold. Too late she found the old love welling up in her heart. She sinned deeper then, and voluntarily removed the life that stood between her and her wishes; then came another check—the man she loved not wisely but too well had let his heart stray into another's keeping.

How Sybil, Lady Aston, had persecuted her rival you know. To-day she had finished her evil work: by her contrivance Alice had been lured to a home for the mentally deranged. It was a wicked scheme. You can guess it all. Lady Aston had, by bribery and other means, discovered a great deal of Dorothea Hardy's family history. She concocted the first telegram. Mrs. Hardy once removed it was easy to tempt Alice Tracy to London on the pretence of joining her.

Drugs were plentifully administered in the coffee supplied to the poor girl by the obliging Collins. Before she had been ten minutes in the train she was unconscious; in this state she was conveyed to Mrs. Deane, a lady who received three or four patients, and who lived in a pretty village in the wildest and loneliest part of Kent.

Mrs. Deane's was not a madhouse; she only took people who required a "little care." She had been at this calling for some years now, and had found it lucrative. To do her justice, she treated her inmates kindly, and, as a rule, they were not quite in their right mind; she honestly believed Alice Tracy, or Miss Vavasour as she had been described to her, was such a one; the blame of the affair rested with Lady Aston, not with Mrs. Deane.

The maid Collins, the same George Arnold had seen at the Manor, went straight up to the sofa and looked at her mistress with a strange expression of contempt.

"It is done," she said, shortly. "Miss Tracy is not likely to trouble you again."

A look of triumph came into Sybil's eyes.

"You can go home, my lady, and catch Mr. Arnold if you can," went on the maid, insolently; "but I've done enough in the business now. I shouldn't care to be mixed up in anything else. Give me the money we agreed on and let me go."

How her words relieved the countess. She had come to fear this woman as she had never feared anyone before in all the world: only Collins entirely knew her evil secrets; others might guess them—one other did a little more—but the only one who had positive proof against her was Collins.

So while Alice Tracy, in the agony of her grief, was a prisoner at Sunnyside, Sybil, Lady Vavasour, counted out to her maid the price of her silence, and the maid took it greedily and left her.

The maid, like the mistress, had sinned for gold. We know gold brought little happiness to Sybil; it was a strange coincidence that Collins sailed three days afterwards for America carrying with her her precious hoard, and the ship went down with every soul on board.

CHAPTER XL.

DISAPPEARED.

Present fears are less than horrible imaginings.
SHAKESPEARE.

DOROTHEA HARDY never paused on her journey from Scotland to Belgium, save when she was positively forced to do so by the arrangement of railway companies and steamboats. So far from telegraphing to Alice, from London, she never paused even half an hour in that busy capital.

Her love and anxiety for Alice, seemed for a moment lost in her love and anxiety for the aunt she had looked on as a mother. Weary, travel-stained, worn out by alternate hopes and fears, she presented herself at the door of the English chaplain's pretty white stone villa. A maid admitted her whose unmistakeably British face inspired her with relief.

"How is Mrs. Stone? I hope she is better?" "Mrs. Stone, ma'am?" with respectful surprise. "She has not been ill."

Five minutes more and Dorothea was in her aunt's arms weeping bitterly; the suspense had been too much for her. After all these weeks of anxiety and worry this new trouble had completely overtaken her strength.

She clung nervously to her aunt, utterly unable to explain how she came there or what had summoned her. Mrs. Stone loved the young widow as her own child; she knew no light thing would have troubled her thus. Tenderly soothing her she begged her to tell her what was grieving her. Dorothea gave her the cruel telegram.

"But, my dear, who could have sent? I never was better in my life."

"It was cruel," sobbed Dora. "Who could have been so wicked?"

Mrs. Stone was a good correspondent. She knew all about the fair young girl whom Mrs. Hardy had engaged as companion, and whose history had proved so strange and tragic. She had praised Dora for her generous defence of her friend. She never linked Alice Tracy's story with the forged telegrams. Her son, who came in presently to welcome his cousin, was more sharp-sighted.

"It is as clear as day," observed the clergyman. "This poor Miss Tracy evidently has many enemies. They do not dare to touch her while you are with her, Dorothea, but the moment you are gone their opportunity comes. They send a telegram to entice you away."

"I do not understand," replied the young widow, putting one hand to her aching head. "They could not try her over again."

"Lady Aston was influenced by personal dislike, gathered from your letters."

"Oh, yes; I think she hated Alice."

"Well, if the poor girl fell into her power it would be easy enough for her to hide her so that she disappeared as completely as though she were dead."

"Dead?" in amazement. "What do you mean?"

But the Reverend Manus Stone was a little nettled. He had conceived a fine theory, and he was vexed when other people did not see its force.

"Have you never heard of lunatic asylums?" he asked, bluntly. "For a woman in Lady Aston's position it would not be an impossibility to immure a patient in one without her consent."

"A lunatic asylum?" gasped Dorothea. "And I have exposed her to it; it is my doing."

And then, with a bitter sob, her head fell back on the cushion, and her two hands hung listlessly by her side. The blow was too much. After a year of perfect ease Dorothea had suddenly been exposed to three months of constant anxiety.

She had lived, so to speak, in terror of a coming trouble. Barely three days before that terror was removed; the law had not condemned her friend. She had planned a tranquil happiness for them both, and now a danger more awful than any she had dreamed of arose, and it was her fault.

Kindly hands bore the slender form upstairs; kindly fingers took off the travelling dress, and strove by every means to restore consciousness; nothing seemed of any avail. Two hours after her fainting-fit Dorothea was lying on one of the dainty white beds smelling so sweetly of roses and lavender, her clear eyes still closed, her teeth clenched, her hands cold as ice.

A doctor came promptly in reply to an urgent summons. No foreign luminary, but a clever English physician who, taking a holiday from overwork, chanced to be visiting in the village. He gave one look at the fair, pale face, and then he told Mrs. Stone that her niece was dangerously ill.

"Some terrible shock to the nerves," observed the man of science, gravely. "Brain fever is coming on rapidly."

His words were but too true. Before morning Dorothea was raving in all the wildness of delirium; her eyes bright with a feverish sparkle,

two red spots burning in her cheeks, her small hand clasped together in an agony as she prayed them to save her, to shut her up and not to let Lady Aston get her.

It was the one fancy of her delirium that the countess was pursuing her. It seemed to the poor, disordered brain that she and Lady Aston were racing each other from Scotland to Keston. Once arrived at Bromley she—Dora—would be safe, but she never quite got there. She was always on the way; but in spite of all her efforts she never gained the desired haven.

Meanwhile, as Dorothea hovered between life and death, people in England began to wonder at her silence; the housekeeper at The Grange and the landlord at the Edinburgh Hotel both wrote to Duke Hardy for instructions. That gentleman himself felt puzzled, it was unlike his previous experience of Dorothea; he began to fear something had happened once more to trouble her as regarded Alice.

Our barrister was not a person to remain in doubt when that doubt could be solved. He thought as little of a journey to Scotland as of a morning walk, so he went over the border himself and interrogated the landlady pretty closely.

The tale he heard bewildered him: Mrs. Hardy had been summoned to her aunt in Brussels, who was dangerously ill; on arriving at London she found her aunt was dead, and her journey to Belgium was, therefore, useless; she telegraphed to Miss Tracy to join her there—here all clue failed.

It was the strangest story Duke had ever heard, and one that annoyed him greatly, even though he detested Dora he did not like to think of her as mysteriously lost. She seemed, so to say, to have vanished off the face of the earth, to have gone like a shadow—no one knew whither.

Duke Hardy remembered one who would be as anxious as himself to discover anything that concerned Alice Tracy. He took the first train to Halsted and astonished George Arnold by a morning visit at Trent Park. Very simply, very calmly he put the facts of the case before the ex-captain. George listened as one in a dream.

"The first question," concluded Duke, "is are they together or separate? that once solved the rest will be easy enough."

"Separate," returned George Arnold, after only a moment's pause; "if they were together we should have heard. Supposing Miss Tracy ill Mrs. Hardy would have written, I feel sure of it."

"I am not. I believe they are together."

"And why?"

"Devotion such as that shown by Mrs. Hardy to her friend is so rare that if they were separated it must be against their own wills."

"I quite agree to that."

"Then your theory is nipped in the bud—if they are separated against their own wills they would come to me for help."

George looked bewildered.

"It is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of—here, in the nineteenth century, two ladies disappear so entirely that not a trace of them remains."

"It appears to me," resumed Duke, grimly, "that someone ought to act and act promptly. Raymond Hardy left me guardian to his widow. I feel responsible in a manner for her safety."

"Do you mean you think there is any danger?" in a strange, husky voice. "Would you tell me that either Alice or her friend has been made to disappear?"

There was no mistaking his meaning. Duke did not attempt to evade the question.

"I think there has been foul play somewhere. People don't forge telegrams for nothing."

"What shall you do? You have no proof the telegram was forged."

"I shall have proof enough soon, I am going over to Brussels at once."

"But your clients?" said George, in amazement.

"It is the Easter vacation. For the matter of

that, Mrs. Raymond Hardy is a client herself."

"I think," said George, gravely, "it would be better to go to London to endeavour to find out about the train Miss Tracy travelled by. It was due very late at King's Cross: it is barely three weeks ago; surely someone will remember the fact of her arrival."

"We can try your plan as well as mine. I declare I see no light in the affair either way. Where's the countess?"

"Which one?"

"The dowager."

"At the Manor; the little countess and her sister are there too, and Mrs. Brown with them. They happened to be there on a visit when Lady Aston came back from England, and I could hardly make them leave at once, it would have been too marked an insult."

"I thought your opinion was the children were unsafe with Lady Aston."

"They are not exactly with her—Mrs. Brown takes excellent care of them; the Manor's a large place, I don't suppose they see their step-mother even once a day."

"Your opinion of her ladyship seems to have improved."

"It is just the same as it was a month ago; but I can prove nothing, and I do not want to come to open warfare."

"And you say the lady has been to England?"

"Yes; she did one very wise thing—left her maid behind her, and she has gone abroad, I believe. I have often thought that maid knew more than she chose to say."

"So does Lady Aston. I expect she could help us to find Miss Tracy and Mrs. Hardy if she chose."

"I have not seen her since her return, but I honestly believe she has no share in the strange disappearance which so baffles us."

"It will not baffle me long," resolutely. "I mean to come to the bottom of it."

"I'll help you. I'll go with you to Belgium, if you'll let me."

"You had better stay here," with a strange expression of his dark eyes; "from what I've been told this morning there's plenty of work lying here ready to your hand."

"What sort of work?" in real surprise.

"When the verdict of 'Not Proven' was given at Edinburgh last month neither you nor I believed it. I fancy, Mr. Arnold, the time has come for disproving it."

"How?"

Only that one little word, but what a weight of eager anxiety was compressed into it.

"Are you superstitious?"

"Don't jest!" cried Arnold, hotly, "I can't stand it."

"I would never jest on an important subject. If I am to help you, you must let me choose my own manner. Once more, are you superstitious?"

"Not for a Scotchman. The people round about are the most blindly credulous set in the world."

"I thought so."

"Why?"

"Have you heard their last idea?"

"No."

"It's reported that Lord Aston's ghost has returned to haunt the Manor. It is said that for more than a fortnight this ghost has paced up and down the lime-tree walk every evening at dusk."

"Rubbish! As though anyone could believe such nonsense."

"Everyone believes it. I have made inquiries. Two of the Manor servants have been frightened into fits. My lady herself is not quite proof against it."

"How comes it that you hear this story the instant you set foot in the place? I never even suspected it."

"People are afraid to tell you. It concerns you as the trustee to put down such gossip for the children's sake, therefore care is taken not to let it come to your ears."

"I'll put a stop to it pretty quickly."

"If you take my advice you'll do no such thing. Never interfere with spirits; it's dangerous."

"You don't mean you believe it?"

"I don't believe in ghosts. I believe someone paces up and down the lime-tree walk. There's nothing done without a motive. This person is playing the ghost for a purpose; it rests with you to find out what."

"Well, I shall keep watch to-night."

"Good! I'll come with you."

Soldier and barrister kept their resolution. At eight o'clock they entered the lime-tree walk, and concealing themselves in a rustic arbour, commenced their watch.

"I don't believe in it," said Arnold, when they had been there a good half-hour and seen nothing.

"Perhaps someone warned Mr. Ghost of our intention."

"Hark! What was that?"

Duke's quick ear caught a slight sound. They listened breathlessly. A minute more and a figure advanced slowly towards them—a man of Lord Aston's height and figure, with the peculiar bowed, feeble appearance which had of late so grown upon the peer. The face was ghastly white; the fingers thin and bony; the hair white and long. Arnold uttered a sharp cry. In spite of his professed unbelief, he had a slight touch of Scotch superstition. For an instant he really believed he was in the presence of his godfather's spirit.

(To be Continued.)

PAINT.

EVERYONE knows, or ought to know, that it is dangerous to sleep in newly painted rooms, on account of the presence of the vapour of turpentine. Several theories, more or less plausible, have been propounded to explain the prejudicial effects of the inhalation of these vapours; but, whatever be the correct explanation, there is no doubt of the danger of occupying a room recently painted in which turpentine has been employed, before complete desiccation has taken place. It was pointed out by the Council of Hygiene, that a sudden death which recently took place in Paris was attributed to this cause, it being shown that it could not be ascribed to the lead which entered into the composition of the paint of the room in which the deceased slept; the lead being fixed and non-volatile, cannot in these cases be accused of being the offending element.

A CLOSE IMITATION.

LONDON beggars are wonderful adepts in the art of deception. Paralysis is often imitated, and so closely that there is no detecting the imposition. A fellow is directed how to hang the elbow, twist the wrist, and drop the fingers of one arm, and to drag the corresponding leg limply after him, counterfeiting a paralytic stroke to the life. Whole days are necessary to accomplish this. Not many years ago one of these worst paralytics, who was accustomed to throw off his seeming infirmity and play the burglar by way of change, was caught in the very act of breaking into a house and committed for trial. Here he got up such a semblance of hopeless paralysis as deceived everybody. Everybody, including the judge and jury, commiserated his case, and he escaped with one year's imprisonment instead of a long term of penal servitude. The doctor of the prison to which the convict was next transferred felt sure that the whole thing was a sham, and tried all the ordinary methods of detection, including a liberal use of the galvanic battery, but without effect. At length a great heap of damp straw was collected in the gaol yard, and the scoundrel, still stretched on his pallet, which he never quitted, was placed thereon. The straw was fired on all sides, throwing out a little flame and dense volumes of

smoke. This did the business, and quickly, too. In less than a minute the paralytic astonished everybody but the doctor by bounding out among them with the agility of a deer, exclaiming that "the game was up."

FACETIE.

THE TURKISH REFORMATION.

(By telegraph, from our own Turkish Spy.)

PERA, FRIDAY.

THE household of the Sultan has been thrown into a state of the utmost consternation at the prospect of a Liberal Government in England. Reforms are now considered inevitable, and among the ladies especially there is a fearful despondency. The Sultan is most determined to economise, and he sent yesterday to Sir Austen Layard to borrow half-a-crown to purchase a housekeeping book. "I'll have no more harem-scarem goings on," he is reported to have said; and the fact that an employé who had been detected smuggling hairpins into the palace on the sly has been bastinadoed confirms the rumour.

SATURDAY.

THE Sultana has just presented her weekly account. There has been a most terrible scene. The Sultan refused to pay for the milk for her favourite cat, and the lady went into a cataleptic fit. But the Sultan was obdurate. "I'm going to hold the puss strings tight," he said, "and so you'll have to try another lait."

MONDAY.

TO-DAY the Sultan has declared that for the future the washing must be done at home. "Instead of soporific laziness in bed, we'll have soaporific activity out of it," were his words.

TUESDAY.

EXPENSIVE Paris bonnets of various shapes and fashions have this morning been abolished. Henceforth the ladies will dress in accordance with an Imperial Hatt which has been designed for the purpose.

WEDNESDAY.

THE Sultan, to save money, is now whitewashing the Palace ceilings with his own hand. Sir Austen Layard has expressed his approval warmly, and has asserted that by this act the Sultan has brought himself within the pale of civilisation.

REACTION.

FIRST MERCHANT: "Well, what's fresh?"

SECOND DITTO: "Oh, I think things are looking better, people getting on their legs again."

F. M.: "Think so?"

S. D.: "No doubt of it. Good many people used to ride, you know—walk now—ta, ta—"

—Punch.

FLIGHTY.

HE: "My dear, your pen has been flying over the paper 'like a bird' all the morning."

SHE: "You see, love, that is because it is a J(ay) pen."

TERPSICHOKEAN MEMS.

DANCING masters are proverbial for their ingenuity. We knew one who, when he unfortunately lost his leg, immediately had an artificial one constructed of Terps-hickory wood.

After much anxious consideration, we have come to the conclusion that the most appropriate dance to "wind up" with is the Scotch "reel."

In State balls the numbers of dancers are always carefully ascertained. This is called getting at the "light fantastic toe-tal."

The Irish national dance is never practised in fashionable assemblies. On the contrary, it would be considered extremely objectionable.

The annual dance of "Jack and the Green" is generally supposed to be a sort of May-eureka.

The reason why all Radicals approve of dancing

is simply because they know it is a salt-a-tory exercise.

The common trade term "dancing pumps" contains a great moral truth. All corpulent people readily admit that dancing pumps quicker than any other exertions yet invented.

—Funny Folks.

THE most terrible maladies sometimes result from disappointment in love. We have heard of a young man in Manchester who was rejected by his innamorata, and mortification immediately set in.

TIME'S REVENGE;

OR,

FOILED AT THE LAST.

CHAPTER XV.

BEATTIE'S NEW HOME.

Oh! th' uncomfortable ways such women have!
DEAUMONT.

"I AM glad to see you, my dear, and hope you were not frightened by the storm," she said, tranquilly.

Beattie felt too confused to be able at the moment to analyse her sensations. She stood like one in a dream, her head half lying on the breast of her father. But as she awakened from an ecstatic dream, the first sound she heard was the voice of her stepmother.

"My dearest, dearest Miss Rochester—come, you really must let me call you Jessie. Some people, you know, seem from the first life-long friends; you must not refuse to stay," Lady Allenby was saying, laughingly. "Nonsense, ma chère, why the other day you dressed for fun in that eighteenth century rose-coloured velvet. My maid shall make you up a toilette only too fine for an everyday mortal."

Jessie Rochester was laughing, but in a somewhat embarrassed manner. The difficulty seemed to be that she could not stay to dinner, being attired in a riding-habit. Even with her father's arm about her, an odd chill struck to Beattie's heart. She did not—could not pause to analyse her feelings. Besides, girls are not in the habit of analysing their feelings. But a shiver chilled her heart; an indefinable dread cowed a girl who had never till this day known the sensation of fear mentally or physically. She, however, looked at Lady Allenby steadfastly—almost rudely, a bystander might imagine.

"Dinner will be spoilt!" cried Lady Allenby, half gaily, half petulantly, glancing at her watch. "Really, you girls must run away, and pray—pray do not be long. I will send my maid to wait on you; I will take no denial," she laughingly went on, almost taking Jessie Rochester in her arms. "Your papa will probably be rushing in presently in time for a cup of coffee, all distraction. Now go, both of you."

She rang the bell sharply, then said, smilingly:

"Eric, come here."

Eric obeyed.

"My son, Eric Armitage," she added, as if addressing both young ladies, but her eyes on Jessie Rochester.

Miss Rochester swept a magnificent curtsey. Beattie stood cold as a figure of ice and looked at him, deciding mentally that she did not like him. Then another servant appeared in answer to the ring. Lady Allenby gave some directions, and the "girls" were spirited away.

An embarrassed silence fell on their departure. Gerald Allenby vanished quietly, and Sir Hubert, his wife, and Eric were left together once more. Lady Allenby knew that she was, in duty bound, obliged to say something about Beattie, but did not feel inclined to do so. She lay back in her chair, slowly fanning her fan with the grace of a Spanish senora, and watch-

ing her husband through her long flickering lashes.

Sir Hubert remained standing where he had been left by Beattie, his eyes cast down, buried in reflection. Eric moved slowly towards the looking-glass once more, and re-arranged his curly, crisp hair, and caressingly stroked the camelia in his coat with a delicate forefinger like a girl's. Presently Lady Allenby rose hastily.

"I must really go and look after those girls, for Jackson is such a stupid creature—a perfect idiot when not in her usual lines."

With an alert step she passed from the room, up to the apartments prepared for Beattie. The two young girls were in the dressing-room, attended by Jackson, Lady Allenby's own maid. Jessie Rochester had said, playfully:

"Her ladyship insists I must stay to dinner, and the only way in which I can possibly be dressed is to wear that rose velvet affair I put on the other day in fun. Do you think it can be managed, Mrs. Jackson?"

"To be sure, miss," replied Jackson, with alacrity. "Is this your box, miss?" she added, turning to Beattie, who stood in a waking trance.

"Yes—oh, yes," answered Beattie, almost starting back when Jackson spoke to her.

Jessie Rochester threw herself into a chair. Jackson ran out of the room, and Beattie, kneeling down, unlocked her box, took out a simple black grenadine dress, with a dark silk skirt, and one or two little jet ornaments, all of the most simple, unpretentious style imaginable.

Jackson ran in again—soberly, not giddily—a superb rose velvet dress over her arm, a look of pleased excitement in her face. As she closed the door it was opened again, and Lady Allenby appeared. She advanced to the little group, and then seated herself with languid grace, perceiving that the skilful Jackson needed no instructions, no reprimands.

In about ten minutes Jessie Rochester was transformed into a queen. Beattie had changed her travelling dress for the simple evening dress—the only one she possessed. Lady Allenby clapped her hands as Miss Rochester swept once or twice down the room, laughing at her own resplendent image in the tall swing-glass.

"Charming, ravishing, my dear Miss Rochester—Jessie, my dearest girl. If Worth himself had designed the costume for you it could not have suited you more admirably. Are you ready?" Jackson, my white and pink feather fan and Honiton lace handkerchief—the one with the deep border, and my pink coral set. Fly, fly, my good soul."

Jackson did fly—it was only the distance of a couple of rooms, across the wide picture gallery—and immediately returned, carrying a pretty little box in her hand. She was as eager as a child dressing some pretty doll. The box contained a beautiful coral negligé, a pair of earrings, and a brooch for the neck.

Jessie accepted these finishing ornaments, and put them on, helped by Jackson. The handsome young girl then looked perfect. Lady Allenby walked round her as she stood motionless as a wax figure, and murmured ecstatically, cooing like some enchanted old pigeon. Of Beattie she had taken absolutely no notice whatever.

"The only fault I find is that you look really too charming," she laughingly declared. "Come, you are ready. Let me offer you my arm. Miss Beatrice, my dear, you are ready, of course?"

She made Jessie take her arm, Beattie being left to follow, and the three went downstairs. In spite of the many conflicting thoughts thronging her over-excited brain, Beattie could not help admiring the lovely figure in advance of her.

Like some exquisite portrait just alighted from one of Reynolds' or Gainsborough's frames it looked, in this eighteenth century rose velvet dress, quaint yet elegant, slightly modernised by the ornaments, and the essentially modern aspect of the wearer, who walked like an ideal duchess.

It was something new to Beattie to find her-

self thus ignored, and treated as nobody. For Aunt Prue, if not of an effusive nature, was invariably just, and never favoured one of her nieces more than the other, though it was well known she liked Fayette best—a fact always acknowledged cheerfully. But, then, everybody loved Fayette.

Beattie was conscious of a general feeling of desolation, of loneliness, of neglect. The hint thrown out by Gerald Allenby about Percy's flirtation with Miss Rochester came painfully into her mind. Lady Allenby never turned even once to speak to her, keeping on a lively running fire of chatter with Miss Rochester until they reached the drawing-room.

Gerald Allenby appeared a moment or two later. Lady Allenby arranged that Sir Hubert should take his daughter down to dinner; Eric she assigned to Jessie Rochester, while she followed half contemptuously in the rear with Gerald.

Beattie looked timidly up in her father's face as the little train swept downstairs. In the twilight she could scarcely discern the expression of his ordinarily calm, sad face, but a fresh chill struck to her heart, and it was with difficulty she crushed back the hot tears that slowly welled up.

Gerald Allenby's countenance was black with fury. As they entered the dining-room, brilliant with lights, silver, china and glass, and hot-house flowers, he lingered for an instant on the white rug outside the door, and clenched his gloved hand at his hostess's suave back and broad, smooth, white shoulders.

"I'll be even with you for this, madam," he whispered, under his breath. "As there is a Heaven above us—by all the gods and all the saints. You try to foil me at every turn, but I'll cry quits with you yet."

CHAPTER XVI.

FAYETTE'S MOTHER.

Thou hast within thee undivulged crimes,
Unwhipp'd of justice. SHAKESPEARE.

FAYETTE was left alone, like a bird whose mate has been taken away. She went up into her room and cried a little, not much, for she felt too utterly miserable and cast down. Then she dried her eyes, and looked out of the window for a little while, as is the habit of young ladies when very unhappy. And finally went to remind Miss Ibbotson that the time was drawing near when she must keep her appointment with—she gulped her words—her mother.

"To be sure," said Miss Ibbotson. "I said I'd go, but I'm sure she, your mother, doesn't want to see me, and I know I don't want to see her. Give her my compliments and excuses."

Then Fayette slowly and reluctantly put on her hat and gloves, and prepared to go out again in the heat, thinking with a sigh what a particularly hot and dusty road lay between the lodge and the "Three Jolly Ploughboys." Miss Ibbotson stood by the window, and gazed after the fragile figure as it wended its way in the glaring sunshine.

"Poor little Faye," she said to herself, pitifully. "I could strangle that woman. I wish some honest, worthy man would come along and marry the girl. I didn't think I was half so fond of her, poor little creature. Pretty creature, she is like some sweet, soft dove."

Somebody else was thinking very intently of Fayette as she slowly toiled along the sultry wayside. Not the honest, worthy man Miss Prue was longing for, but Margaret Lascelles.

"A waxen-faced, wearisome bit of inanity. The kind of intolerable young person who is steeped in sentimentality, faints or weeps on the slightest provocation, like one of Mrs. Radcliffe's Emilias and Miss De Courcies, or Miss Austen's Marias and Sophias. I suppose she will be all the more useful for my purpose. That style of young person 'goes down' with people, otherwise I should not burden myself with her. I'm afraid I must play the hypocrite a little, or

perhaps she will pine and fall ill. She looks as if she has only one idea in her head, and that idea, self. I hope my plans will soon be crowned with success, and then I suppose I could marry her to somebody—somebody who would be of service to me."

Within a few hours Margaret Lascelles had contrived to alter perceptibly the aspect of the room which was for the present converted into a prison. She had, partly with her own hands, re-arranged the antiquated, Queen Anne furniture, looped the chintz curtains into more graceful folds, disposed flowers brought lavishly from the old-fashioned garden to gratify her, in picturesque, heaped masses in the quaint, grotesque old china jars and vases.

As Fayette was slowly coming towards her she sat by the wide open window. Here all was cool, shady pleasantness. But the air was heavy and thunderous, a boding storm slept in the stifling atmosphere.

A slanting beam of yellow sunlight glided past the faded curtains and fell on the dim carpet, revealing some undreamt-of tints, and bringing nearly extinct colours into unexpected sight.

Margaret Lascelles could not see the road from her post of observation. It was very peaceful here; a few birds were twittering rather feebly underneath in the garden. But Margaret Lascelles' thoughts were far away from the reposeful, sunlit view, busy weaving tangled skeins. A gentle knock against the door aroused her from a complicated day-dream.

"Come in," she cried, rather sharply.

Fayette opened the door and stood for a moment irresolutely.

"My sweet child, my darling girl," said Margaret Lascelles, making a feint of rising to meet her, but sinking back with a sigh. "Come to me, let me embrace my dearest one. I was so disappointed when I learnt you could not come early in the day."

Fayette closed the door, as if not loth to linger for a moment longer, then approached. Margaret Lascelles held out her hand, which Fayette touched, and, stooping, kissed.

"Darling child, how I have been yearning for you to come, it is so dull and lonely here, and I long, I pine for a better acquaintance with my—my own, my sweet one. Kiss me, mignonne, petite, my only love."

She put both arms round the slender figure and drew it down until the beautiful face touched her own. For a moment Fayette forgot the chilling influence of yesterday's reception. She laid her soft little hands on her mother's shoulders and looked straight into those clear, cold eyes, steadily, fixedly, searchingly, with unconscious power, with the penetrating gaze of the mesmerist and the innocent steadfastness of a young child.

Her gaze was like the touch of Ithuriel's spear. Margaret Lascelles' glances flickered, trembled, tried to brave that penetrative look, flickered again, and finally the long dark lashes drooped, hiding her big, bold, black eyes.

"Ah!" she cried, covering her face with her thin, white hands. "Lightning!"

Fayette had not observed the flash, but a low, threatening peal of thunder told her that it was no fancy. She withdrew her hands, clasped them in one another and stood like a beautiful statue before the half crouching figure in the chair.

"Sweet, I am so afraid of lightning," murmured Margaret Lascelles, taking her hands from her face. "Come, you will love me, will you not? You will forgive me my faults, you have much to forgive—"

She laid her hand on Fayette's clasped fingers, and unconsciously gripped them mercilessly.

"You hurt me," said Fayette, very quietly.

"Pet, darling, sweet, I would not hurt you for the world," cried Margaret Lascelles, bending down and kissing the little fingers. "You will love me. We shall be happy together, you and I—"

A little chill tremor ran through Fayette's frame, but she showed no outward sign of consciousness under the caress. A second vivid flash of lightning, followed by a terrific peal of thunder, made her start violently, and caused Margaret Lascelles to cover up her face again. Great splashes of rain, sounding to Fayette's disordered fancy like tears, dashed against the latticed panes of the half-closed windows.

"Shut this side of the window, quick!" cried Margaret Lascelles. "It clicks with that brass catch—so—that is right. A storm always frightens me. Pull the curtain over. Oh! I detest a thunderstorm."

Fayette obeyed in silence. She had uttered only three words since entering the chamber. With a firm, untrembling hand, she drew in the quaint old latticed sides of the window, which opened outwards, and then calmly retired to the centre of the room, still utterly silent.

A vivid blue flash of forked lightning blazed for a second round her figure as she paused. But she remained entirely unmoved, though the flash was succeeded by a peal of thunder that seemed to shake the house to its very foundations.

Margaret Lascelles rose and limped with haste, though with great difficulty, to the bed, where she flung herself down, her limbs shaking with fear. Like many other people who are "free" thinkers, and count piety as imbecility, who make a silent mock of all religions, Margaret Lascelles was the slave of superstition.

She believed, with a curious credulity, the wide dogma and teaching of the Church, while hoping and thinking there was no after life beyond the grave, believed in Heaven and hell with the pure faith of a young child, yet doubted and disputed everything told about either, and secretly hoped and trusted both were myths of old ecclesiastical imagination.

She never witnessed a storm without having a terrified fancy that the last day had come, and in every reverberation of thunder felt convinced she heard the tramp that was to summon the quick and the dead to the bar of judgment.

From time to time a faint sobbing breath showed her terror. Fayette never turned her head, but stood like some exquisite figure carved in marble, very pale. Her deep blue eyes turned to the darkened sky, her hands linked in one another.

She was scarcely thinking, or rather, was scarcely conscious of the thoughts that passed through her busy brain. As she stood thus, white, motionless, she looked like a waiting angel, or the spirit of the storm.

It was a violent, short-lived storm, and by-and-bye the lightning came at longer intervals, the thunder growled afar off, the rain gradually began to clear away, the sunlight gleamed out in uncertain patches.

Fayette never stirred, but stood immovable. Margaret Lascelles, her fright subsiding, noticed the dead silence of the young girl, and half rising from her abjectly prostrate attitude, gazed attentively at her.

"The little monkey looks as if she had been turned to a pillar of salt," she muttered to herself. "I know she has a temper, and a nasty one. I know quite well she will be nothing but a worry. My dear," she added, aloud, "why do you stand like that? It is so stupid, and it fidgets me. Come here, and sit by me. I want to talk to you."

Fayette, as if awakened from a mesmeric trance, turned, and then, after a moment's hesitation, obeyed, but with a sinking heart and a very pale face.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Margaret Lascelles, forgetting all her tremors, and lying so as to conveniently command a full view of her daughter's face. "Never mind. Have you thought at all of the life we are going to lead together, you and I? I am unable to offer you anything now but my true heart and my humble lodging. But you are entitled to a good fortune, if I can obtain justice for you, my sweet darling."

Fayette looked at her in surprise. Her eyes spoke, though she uttered no words.

"You shall have justice, my love. I am glad that person—our friend Miss Ibbotson—has not come, as I wish to speak freely to you. I have no objection to your repeating to her what I may tell you, but I don't care to have her cold stare on me. She is one of the most unpleasant—However, I must not forget that she has been kind to you. Your cousin Beatrice has gone to her home, I believe?"

"Yes," said Fayette, in very low tones, dim tears rising in her eyes.

"Listen. Your father was the elder brother of her father, and the whole estate and revenue ought to be divided between Sir Hubert and you."

"I do not understand."

"Had your father left a son, instead of a daughter, the whole property would come to him, and Sir Hubert would have had a poor provision. I married your father in Scotland. I shall have a little difficulty in proving the marriage, but it can be done, and then farewell to misery—struggling, hateful poverty."

The room seemed to Fayette's fancy to slowly turn round as she listened. Nothing but the mother's evident dislike and lack of sympathy, and expressed abhorrence of "scenes," saved her from either swooning away, going into hysterics, or falling at her mother's feet and covering her hands with kisses. She sat in perfect silence, her trembling fingers close intertwined, her eyes fixed on her mother's face.

The relief of hearing that the marriage doubted by Aunt Prue had really taken place was almost too great. Margaret Lascelles took it for granted that the young girl was dazzled by the prospect of riches, and felt secretly pleased to find a weak place to attack.

"The sooner we leave this disgraceful neighbourhood the better," she went on. "I am always so unlucky—or so stupid," she added, with a little flickering smile. "We shall go to London, child. I suppose you have never seen that big wilderness, eh?"

"Never," answered Fayette, dreamily, her eyes drooping.

She longed to ask a few questions, but felt herself so far away from this stranger that her courage failed to shape the inquiries into words.

"When we obtain our money we will travel," continued Margaret Lascelles, warming almost into joyousness. "But it may be a hard fight. I may be obliged to go to law with Sir Hubert. If he agrees to my proposals, well and good. If he refuses our just demands, then let him be prepared for strong measures. When you are with me you shall do as you please. You must have led a dull life, child, with that ridiculous old tramp Prue Ibbotson."

"I have been very happy with her," replied Fayette. "I owe her all the love and gratitude I can give her."

Margaret Lascelles sniffed—a sniff worthy of Aunt Prue herself—but did not answer in words. The dialogue languished. It would have best suited the intriguing woman had Fayette been a wax doll or a young child. She hated the innocent face, with its clear, intelligent eyes; she knew that it would be as impossible to enlist the soul looking through those blue eyes in a base conspiracy as it would be to enlist the services of an angel from Heaven.

She dreaded the danger of discovery by this guileless being, who might prove a formidable obstacle to success. However, with Gerald Allenby's aid, which she felt sure would come in good time, with her own daring, and with this beautiful young creature to put forward as an advanced guard, as a silent advocate, she had not the shadow of a doubt that success would crown her audacious plot.

"What time does Prue Ibbotson expect you back?" she asked, desirous of ridding herself for awhile of this girl, whose presence irritated and annoyed her.

"She did not fix any particular hour for me to return. But perhaps—perhaps—"

"Perhaps she will feel uneasy about you, as the storm was so unexpected and so violent. But you must stay to luncheon with me. Ring that bell. Thanks. Is Prue very savage against me? Does she speak against me?"

Fayette's limpid blue eyes glowed with mild reproach.

"No," she simply replied.

"Does she speak of me at all? You need not answer. I know by the tell-tale crimson on your cheeks at this moment that she has been saying things about me. What has she said? Tell me," Margaret Lascelles went on, in a sharp, almost snarling tone. "What has she said?"

Her little white hand clenched into a hard little fist, and she looked as if she would not have been ill pleased to hit her daughter. There was no doubt Margaret Lascelles had a remarkably bad temper—a temper evidently little accustomed to discipline.

"She was obliged to speak on the subject, as you came for me," said Fayette, a slight bitterness in her tone.

"Of course she was. Never mind. I don't want to force your confidence, which you do not give me willingly, although I am your mother. I know quite well what she said. She said that it was disgraceful conduct my leaving you all these years. That I am one of the most objectionable of females—and," Margaret Lascelles added, fixing her eyes on Fayette as if she would catch the most fleeting admission in her face, "she said she was sure I never was married at all. I am glad you don't deny all this. Never mind. I hate old Prue, and I owe her no thanks for anything. Ring again."

Fayette obeyed. The maid Sarah appeared presently in answer to this second summons, and received orders for the proposed frugal little meal.

When the tray was brought it made a diversion in the dialogue. Margaret Lascelles carefully avoided any topic likely to lead to her own past experiences, and merely asked desultory questions enabling her to form a notion of how Fayette had spent her young life.

She tried to excite Fayette's interest and curiosity by telling her about anything likely to interest a young girl about the great metropolis.

Unfortunately for the success of her object, Fayette had no idea in connection with the big city; it was a place she had hardly ever thought about, and it was as difficult to picture even ordinary scenes and sights to her as it would have been to photograph them on a child's mind. She was an intelligent listener, and tried to seem pleased; but her thoughts were obviously bent on other things. Even when she attempted to look most attentive she made no responsive remarks, and there was an absorbed expression on her face, betraying that her mind was far away.

"She is the most ineffably stupid creature I ever met with in my life," thought Margaret Lascelles. "I should go melancholy mad if I were six months in her company. Really, it seems to me she is little better than an idiot. However, one can't expect to have all the good qualities united in one, and she is excellently well adapted for my purpose. I fancy she has elastic powers of credulity, and that innocent milk-and-water face of hers would impose on any ordinary body of twelve decent male citizens, if she were placed before them."

It was a relief to both when the day wore on sufficiently to be a fair warning that Fayette must turn her steps homewards. Homewards! The word struck with a painful significance on the poor girl's heart. Soon The Sycamores would no longer be her home.

However, she was sensible and to a great extent practical, so she readily argued to herself that in any case she must have quitted that old familiar place before long, and she might have been obliged to go out alone into the unknown world. But then again the spirit of discontent, or some strange, deep-seated instinct, answered that it would have been easier to feel satisfied with this unsympathetic woman who now caught her hand had she been an utter stranger.

This woman who claimed to be her mother was in every way so different from the mother who had until now been a life-long dream. But, Fayette argued to herself, "real things, real life, are so different from fancies." As she stood up, put on her hat with fingers that trembled a little, and paused for a few moments before Margaret Lascelles, it was with difficulty that she crushed back the tears which were half choking her.

"I suppose I shall be tied to this horrid place for some weeks to come," grumbled Margaret Lascelles; "but we shall see. If I make up my mind to go, go I will. Of course, directly I go, you go too. Present my kindest and best love to Prue, with my grateful thanks for all benefits received," she added, with undisguisedly spiteful sarcasm. "My gratitude is no hypocritical sense of coming benefits, for after we have left this abominable spot I hope and believe we shall never meet again. Good-bye, child; take care of yourself—always take care of yourself, my dear, and your friends (if you have any) will like you all the better. Come and cheer me up to-morrow; I feel so horribly dull; can't even get a chance to read a book. Good-bye, my sweet love; I hope many happy days are in store for us, darling. Good-bye."

This last word was pronounced in her disagreeably silver intonation. She drew down Fayette's face, and impressed a torpid kiss on her forehead, knocking herself rather sharply against the edge of Fayette's straw hat as she did so. The grimace she made was accounted for, and Fayette, saying gently, "Good-bye, my mother, to-morrow I hope to come again," went away.

As she closed the door Fayette paused for a minute or two like one drowning who reaches the surface of the water and catches a despairing breath. She pressed both hands against her eyes with a strange sense of aching, and tried to rally all her half-exhausted powers, mental and physical. With slow footsteps she descended the stairs, and so out into the welcome fresh evening air.

On the threshold she stopped, a sudden thought occurring to her that she had not asked one solitary question about her dead father, nor had her mother volunteered one solitary atom of information about him. This unexpected recollection seized her so much by surprise that she remained for an instant like a figure irresolute between tragedy and comedy. Then had she yielded to the impulse which seized her, she would have flown back upstairs and dashed at the sphynxian woman she had just left.

But she did not do so. Fayette was no silly dreamer. Nobody brought up under Miss Prue Ibbotson's superintendence could by any possibility have been dreamy or foolishly romantic. Fayette was a remarkably sensible girl. With one resolute effort she succeeded in rallying her half-frozen faculties.

"It is of no use worrying or troubling," she said to herself. "This thing has happened. I suppose real life is a hard fight, after all, to some people. All the fighting and fretting and struggling I can do will not alter my circumstances. Let me go quietly on and do my best. I am quite old enough to be able to bear a little rough shaking from my baby fancies. It is only like being obliged to get up on a winter's morning when you have been wakened out of some pleasant dream. I must not be silly. Aunt Prue would only laugh at me if I told her what a stultified ninny I have been."

By dint of arguing and reasoning with herself all the way "home," Fayette worked herself into an almost sheepish condition of mind, which was an improvement on her miserable state. Ordinarily, she felt almost a sensuous delight in the beauty of sunlight, green trees, blue skies, even the kine or the darting birds which might skim past her; but now, although it was almost an ideally lovely evening, pure and tranquil, she walked like one blind.

Aunt Prue was always ferociously industrious, and never forgot to improve each hour, whether it was shining or dim. Fayette found her in



[MY LADY'S FAVOURITE.]

her favourite little room busily engaged in some kind of needlework. For a long time Aunt Prue had anxiously struggled against being obliged to wear spectacles, and even now she hated being surprised when they were on her nose.

As Fayette opened the door Aunt Prue whipped off her spectacles, although her young relative was accustomed to them, and quietly popped them into her work-basket. Fayette was as pale as a marble statue. Miss Ibbotson noticed this, but thought it wisest not to do so in words. Fayette silently kissed her, and then sat down.

"Tired, my dear?"

"No, aunt."

"Would you like a little tea?"

"No, thanks, aunt. I am just a little tired, but it is of no consequence."

"Was—your mother—" the name stuck like Macbeth's "Amen!"—"was she cross because I did not go?"

"I don't think so. She was very much frightened by the storm."

"Umph! people with guilty consciences sometimes are afraid of thunder and lightning," muttered Miss Ibbotson, under her breath. "What did she talk about—anything in particular?"

"She told me one thing, Aunt Prue—she told me that she and my father were married."

"Did she? I am truly glad to hear it—very, very thankful, for your sake, child. Did she say where?"

"In Scotland."

"Scotland is not a very big place, but still it is big enough to need a good deal of exploring if one went to look for a small fact there. Did she name the exact spot or locality?"

"She merely said Scotland, and—"

"And you would not make your fortune as a cross-examining barrister if ladies were admitted to the bar. I will pay her a visit to-morrow," added Miss Ibbotson, bristling up, her pinky nose taking a deeper tinge. "It is

a very odd thing she should still call herself—but I forgot, she thought I would not recognise her under any but the old name I knew long ago. Of course, my dear, it would naturally be an awkward thing for her to enter at any length on the subject of her marriage with your father to you. Of course, it is inconsiderate of me to be so hard. But I mean to ask her all about it myself when I see her to-morrow. Of course, she will only be too delighted to have an opportunity of setting herself right with me, especially as we have always hated one another so cordially. She must know I have always had the worst possible opinion of her."

As Miss Ibbotson went on with her remarks she had begun to double down a hem at the edge of her work, and so happened not to be looking at Fayette. But as she concluded, the young girl's dead silence surprised her, and she raised her eyes. The expression in Fayette's white, worried face was an answer in itself. With penitence very unusual with her, she put her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"I am entirely in the wrong to speak so of your mother, my dear," she said, gently. "I will try not to do so again. My tongue sometimes—too often, I am afraid—runs away with me. Let us have a quiet hour with those essays on Shakespeare, and then we will have our frugal little meal and go to bed. Dear me, how I miss Beattie! She could always make sunshine in a shady place. What an advantage it is to have a lively disposition. There is the book, my dear. I hope Beattie has arrived safe and comfortable at her home. I wonder how her new mother met her. No doubt we shall have a letter from her in a day or two telling us all her adventures."

Miss Ibbotson's chatter, purposely prolonged, gave Fayette time to completely regain her self-possession. The inward ache was still painfully present, but outwardly, except for her observable paleness, she was the same as usual. For about an hour she steadily read aloud to her aunt, a sheer waste of time in one respect, as

the printed words ran idly by both reader and auditor like rippling water.

At the habitual time Patsy came to say that supper was ready, Miss Ibbotson having always retained that old-fashioned meal. It was the first time in all the years of her life that Fayette could remember having sat down to the frugal evening meal without facing Beattie. As if by chance, but in reality by mutual design, both altered their ordinary places at table. A chill silence fell like a cloud of embarrassment over the cosy room hitherto so comfortable.

Aunt Prue, Beattie, and Fayette had never suffered one day's illness, nor had they ever been visited by any but the most transient worry, therefore the present change was an amazing one. The Sycamores had hitherto resembled one of those sleepily quiet homes hardly met with out of the fairy-tale books, and now it still resembled those fantastic spots when invaded by a malicious fairy.

"Tell me about my father," said Fayette, abruptly, rousing herself from her sombre reflections with an effort.

"Your father, child? I cannot; I never saw him, and never heard anything about him. I almost entirely lost sight of your mother during the time she was at Altenham. Before that we were a good deal together one way and another. I happened to see Beattie's father every day for some months after he married my sister, for when his father, old Sir Randal, flew into such a passion with him he came to live with us—he and my sister came—but not for long. I never even once saw your father, and scarcely know what he was like. Somebody told me he was very handsome and very delightful and fascinating; but I can't tell you anything about him. To-morrow, when we go to see Margaret, your mother, I will put some questions to her. She ought to be too pleased to answer me, and I have no doubt your reasonable and filial desire to know more will be gratified."

(To be Continued.)



[PARTED.]

PEARL'S LEGACY;

OR,

TWO WOMEN'S LOVE.

(A COMPLETE STORY.)

CHAPTER I.

PARTED.

Trifles light as air
Are to the jealous confirmation strong
As proofs of Holy Writ. SHAKESPEARE.

A PLETTY room in a small though tasteful house at South Kensington, the furniture of the simplest kind, and yet so perfect in its harmony as to have charmed an artist's eye. The two who sat there thought but little of their surroundings; their minds were full of other things.

For two weeks they had been engaged lovers. Rosamond Dane loved Reginald Yorke with her whole soul, and he returned her affection. There was no obstacle in the world to their union, and yet they sat opposite each other in gloomy silence, a cloud on her face, an angry light gleaming in his dark eyes.

Mr. Yorke was a strikingly handsome man. He had clearly-cut, aristocratic features, a high, intellectual forehead, eyes which could look very tender, despite their present anger, and a smile which won him golden opinions. She whom he has chosen for his life's partner was barely twenty-two, a girl whose beauty was questioned by many, and whose face yet gained all hearts; a small, arched mouth, a nose the laureate styles "tip-tilted," two dark blue eyes, and a fair skin lit up by a glorious warmth of colouring. Such was Rosamond. He was the first to break the silence which had fallen on them.

"For the last time, Rosamond, will you answer me?"

She raised her blue eyes to his face. Love beamed in their depths, though there was a proud, hard expression on her mouth.

"I have answered you, Reginald. I tell you it is all true. I was in Kensington Gardens this morning. It was I you saw."

"Good heavens!" he cried, his voice full of passionate scorn. "Is there no truth or honour left? You, my promised wife—you, Rosamond Dane—hold secret meetings with another man! You let him put his arm round you, you suffer him to kiss your face."

"As you played the spy so well," she answered, indignantly, "there is no occasion for me to tell you. It is all true. I can say no more."

He got up and paced the room in silence for a few moments.

"You do not like to tell me," began the girl, simply. "You shrink from saying you are sorry you asked me to be your wife. I will say it for you, Reginald. I will give you back your freedom."

She took a hoop of opals off her white finger and handed it to him. It was just what he had intended. He believed her false—he had no faith in her. Yet it gave him a bitter pain to see her remove the ring he had given her such a little while before. Such hopes had been centred on it. False and frail though she might be, she was his first love, the only woman, he knew, in the wide world for him.

"Rosamond"—the anger was gone now, and his voice was full of passionate tenderness—"Heaven forgive me if I have been harsh to you. What can I do but believe my own eyes?"

"Nothing," very proudly and coldly. "I have told you I deny nothing. You have no faith or trust in me. Love without these is worthless. Once more, Reginald, you are free."

He stands looking at her in doubt. He has loved her—no, he loves her still—with such an overpowering love that he cannot bear to leave her. But her own lips have condemned her.

He has seen her in another's arms, and she admits the fact and refuses all explanation. What can he do but accept the freedom she offers him?

"Good-bye," he says, slowly. "You have taken my heart for the plaything of an hour. You have blighted my dearest hopes, and yet somehow I cannot bear to leave you."

"You will forget," she answers, in a voice that does not falter. One so unworthy will soon pass from your memory. The world is wide enough for us to live apart. None of your friends know of our engagement. I will tell my parents it is my doing that we are separated. There will be no occasion for you to see them then."

She places the ring in his hand. It is the only present he has ever given her, for their intimacy has been short, barely three months in all, two of which have been spent in pleasant wanderings in the Black Forest, one in all the emptiness of London autumn. He takes the ring, throws it on the ground, and stamps on it.

"Rosamond, I believe you have no heart. You care no more for my suffering than a stick or a stone. You can never have loved me even from the first."

"No," returned the girl, firmly. "From the first my feelings were what they are now—from the first I have deceived you as I did to-day."

As this avowal falls on his ears Reginald Yorke leaves the room with one last look of angry reproach at the syren who has once ensnared him.

She is false—quite false. His own eyes have seen it; her lips have confirmed it, and yet for weeks and months her face lives in his memory waking and sleeping; those blue eyes haunt him. Worthless though she may be, he knows he shall go down to his grave loving Rosamond Dane. She whom he had deserted sat quite still, but when the door had closed on him; when the last sound of his footsteps had died away, the set, icy look on her face relaxed.

With one bitter cry she threw herself on the ground. There, with her face buried in the sofa cushions, she wept as though her heart would break.

"He might have trusted me; I loved him so. Ought I to have told him who it was he saw with me? Had he only asked me differently I must have told him; but he doubted me from the first; he could not trust me. Reginald," almost as though he had been there to hear, "my love, how am I to live without you? I gave you my whole heart; I loved you always, and I have lost you, my love, my love!"

A little clock on the mantelpiece chimed five; the winter's day is drawing in. Rosamond rises though with an effort, and drags herself to a chair near the fire. She shivers, in spite of the cheerful blaze, and heavy sobs shake her frame, but she has a strong will, and by degrees she grows calmer. Her cheeks are no longer wet with falling tears; her eyes are dry, though they burn with a feverish heat, and she looks a very weak of the Rosamond who entered that room two hours before, full of hope and happiness, to greet her lover.

Very slowly, very languidly, almost as though each movement hurt her, Rosamond leaves the pretty drawing-room and goes down the corridor to a smaller room, before whose door thick red curtains are drawn closely. She pushes these aside and enters. It is her mother's boudoir, and that mother is an invalid.

Mrs. Dane is reclining on a sofa drawn quite close to the blazing fire—a pretty woman still, and wonderfully like her daughter, only cast in a different mould. Her face lacks the strength and decision written on her child's—a sweet, fragile creature bowing instinctively to any will stronger than her own; a being formed to be petted and cared for. Such is the artist's wife and Rosamond's mother.

"I thought you were with Reginald," says Mrs. Dane, smiling, "or I should have sent for you; the afternoon has seemed very long without you, Rose."

"You missed me, then, mamma?"

"I always miss you, dear. I can't think what I shall do when you are married."

"You need not think about that," says Rosamond, calmly, yet with a great lump rising in her throat. "Reginald and I have found out our mistake before it was too late. I shall never leave you, mamma—never!"

She lays her fair face beside the faded one on the pillow, and struggles hard to repress the tears that are so very nearly shed.

"Rose," says Mrs. Dane, gently, "you must not sacrifice yourself to me."

"It is not that, mamma. Don't you understand? Mr. Yorke regrets the honour he did me, and I have set him free."

"Do you mean that he broke off the engagement, Rosamond?"

"I think we both did it, mother. It was the only thing to do."

"I cannot understand it. He was so fond of you."

"He gave me his love, but he kept back his trust. I will never marry any man who does not trust me."

"What will your father say?"

"Papa will think it right because I did it. He never condemns anything I do."

And then there comes to them both the memory of one who had not had this influence with Mr. Dane; who indeed had hardly ever succeeded in pleasing him at all; who now was at open warfare with him, and forbidden his house—his only son.

"Do not let us talk of Reginald," says Rosamond, after a long, long pause. "Let us try to forget all this last fortnight, mamma; I have such good news for you."

"Of Henry? Have you had another letter from him?"

"I have done better; I have seen him," noticing with joy how the invalid's face brightened. "I met him to-day in Kensington Gardens. He sent his love to you, mamma, and you are not to fret about him, for he is doing very well. He earns quite a good living

at his reporting, and he works on his picture too. He hopes they will admit it at the Academy."

"I think that would touch your father's heart, Rosamond."

"I think so too. It is the likeness of his little boy. Fancy Henry having a child whom we have never seen. I think when papa sees the picture he will forgive Henry his marriage and send for him and his wife. It would be good to have them here, mamma."

CHAPTER II.

SPRINGTIME.

In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove.

In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love. HALL.

THE winter days dragged their weary course. No chance brought about a meeting between Rosamond Dane and the man she loved. As she had told him the world was wide enough for them to drift apart, and so it proved. They had no common friends, no mutual acquaintances to bring them together.

Rosamond saw little society of any kind. The little she did see was composed entirely of artists. Mr. Yorke, the younger son of a noble house, moved entirely among his own order, and so through all December's dreary course and the New Year's festivities nothing chance to bring these two together.

Both struggled to forget, and on the first blush the man appeared to succeed better than the woman. Reginald had nothing to remind him of Rosamond. He had many friends, and life still held chances for him, although his love dream had been roughly broken. He thought of it often as people think of cherished hopes that have been blighted, but it was not to him the one absorbing regret it was to her.

It seemed to Rosamond Dane that each day that came made her burden heavier. Everything about her home reminded her dumbly of Reginald; every room had an association with him. She hid her grief bravely. She was still her mother's comfort and her father's pride, but the struggle was almost too hard. The clear skin lost its brilliant colouring; the bright laughing face changed; the round cheeks flew away, and left a delicate oval face with a grave, sweet smile. A woman, not a girl, lovelier perhaps than she had ever been in her gay, careless youth, but with a loveliness created by the hand of sorrow—a girl no longer; a woman to suffer and be strong.

Her prophecy was fulfilled. When her brother's picture hung on the walls of the Academy; when art critics one and all raised their voices in that brother's praise, old Mr. Dane relented. He forgave the son he had discarded for marrying a portionless governess, and received him and his wife warmly and affectionately. Joy reigned at the little house in South Kensington.

Mrs. Dane grew stronger in her happiness. All seemed bright and festive, only that to Rosamond something was always wanting. She was in these rejoicings, but not of them. May, which brought these changes to the Danes, brought a yet greater one to Reginald Yorke. By the deaths of an uncle and cousin he had succeeded to the family honours and become Lord Bertram of Lisle. Rank and fortune came to him in one bound, and he had been less than human not to rejoice at it.

He did not go to his new estate except for a flying visit, nor yet did he linger in London for the season. The end of May found him at the house which had always been more like home to him than any other, Ashley Manor, the seat of his sometime guardian, Colonel Ashley.

It was a fair English homestead nestling among the Surrey hills. Boy and man Reginald had loved the place. Colonel Ashley and his gentle wife had always been his dearest friends. It was to them he turned in the hour of his sorrow when Rosamond's falseness seemed to have darkened his whole life. It was there he

learned to bury his grief in his own heart, and to believe that there lived women good and true, though one had lied to him.

It was Pearl Ashley taught him this; the colonel's only child; he had known her all her life, ever since he, a rough schoolboy, had made much of the toddling mite of three. At thirty and nineteen their intimacy continued. He had looked on Pearl all her life as a little sister; even had he never met Rosamond Dane he would never have thought of falling in love with her.

She was a great contrast to the girl he had loved so madly: Pearl was a delicate, child-like creature, with thick golden curls hanging to her waist, and soft, expressive grey eyes; her face was like wax in its delicate, colourless purity; and there was a strange grace in her smile, which had in it little of earth. Gentle and tender, humble and loving, she was made of very different metal to wayward, impetuous, proud, impulsive Rosamond.

They sat together one afternoon in the picturesque grounds of the Manor, Pearl with a blue shawl wrapped closely round her, Reginald in a shooting suit of grey tweed; they were talking of many things, especially of his new home, Bertram Towers, and the life he would lead there.

"It will be terribly lonely," said the new peer, laughing. "Pearl, you ought to take pity on me and come and brighten it up."

Never were words spoken more lightly or taken more seriously. Reginald simply meant Pearl must come with her father and mother on a long visit; she thought he alluded to a very different thing—to her coming there as his wife. A faint pink blush coloured her cheeks, the grey eyes brightened.

"You would like it, Pearl," suspecting nothing of the meaning she attached to his words.

For one instant she was silent, then she stretched out her hands to him.

"I am so young and foolish, Reginald, and you are so wise and clever. Can you really care for me like that?"

Lord Bertram understood her mistake, at the same moment he learned her secret—knew that this gentle girl he had regarded as a sister loved him. He had deemed all thought of love and marriage ended for him since a day in last November, but he never hesitated now. Pearl should never know the mistake she had made, never guess he had not asked her to be his wife. She loved him, she was good and true. Why should all his life lay waste because one woman had been false?

"Pearl, little Pearl," he said, tenderly, "will you really come, will you be my wife and brighten up my home?"

To Pearl he was a king among men. She had loved him all her life; the love had grown with her growth, and strengthened with her strength. That moment seemed to her perfect bliss; she never wondered that in his wooing he said nothing of love—never marvelled at the simple matter-of-fact manner of this wooing; the whole world seemed bright to her as she answered:

"I will, indeed!"

He shivered even in the May sunshine as he thought of his last proposal and its acceptance, as the vision of Rosamond rose up before him, and he knew, whatever he had thought before, that his love for her was smouldering, not dead. But he never faltered; she had been false, she was lost to him; this fair child at his side loved him, she should be his wife, and Heaven helping him, he would make her happy.

"You shall never repent your consent, Pearl," he answered, tenderly. "I will do all that heart and mind can to make you happy."

"I shall always be happy while you love me, Reginald."

He does not love her, he knows he never shall love her as she means, but he never swerves from his purpose; he will marry her and make her happy; she need never guess that another woman has held sway over his heart—nay, holds it still.

"I am not worthy of you, Pearl," he says, a little brokenly, as he looks at the loving child, and realises she has given him what he never can return. "I am not worthy of you, but I will try to make you happy."

"It won't be very difficult to do that," says Pearl, with a pretty smile. "I have always been happy all my life, I don't think, Reginald, I can remember one hour of sadness."

It comes on him then with an awful suddenness, that if this be so her first sorrow will come through him; and, though he is not a religious man, he breathes a prayer to Heaven that no blight may fall on her happiness through fault of his.

They walk on towards the house. Pearl picks great boughs of flowering may and carries them; they are too heavy and Reginald shares the burden. They both enter the house laden with the bright red blossoms.

"Dear heart, Miss Pearl," cries her old nurse, meeting them in the hall and speaking her mind with all the liberty of an old retainer, "don't bring that into the house; don't you know whoever brings may into the house brings sorrow along with it?"

"Nonsense!" cries Pearl, laughing. "I am not superstitious."

But Reginald was apparently, for he dropped his own load and gently took hers away. They went into the dining-room then together; no one was there. Pearl lingered a minute and then went upstairs to get ready for lunch.

For a quarter of an hour Reginald sat alone trying to realise the change in his position; he had no regrets; given the opportunity, he would not have retracted; the one woman he had loved was faithful, he would be happier with this simple child than alone; besides, he could not have told her of her mistake.

He wondered sadly if he should ever be worthy of her love; he saw their married life in fancy's eyes just as it would be—calm, unemotional, peaceful, passionless; and then he thought of Rosamond, variable as an April day, changeable, capricious, yet full of life and gaiety; a wilful piece of humanity, a rose with thorns, and he blamed himself fiercely that he could prefer such a flower to the pure white lily of which Pearl was such a perfect type.

Colonel and Mrs. Ashley entered together. Reginald went up to them without hesitation; his mind was quite made up.

"You have known me all my life," he said, simply; "you both know all my faults. I have come to ask you for the most precious thing you have to give me. I know I am not worthy of Pearl, but I will try to make her happy, and—and I think she loves me."

He met with no opposition: this had been the wish of both. Colonel Ashley knew Reginald was a good man and true one, to whom he could trust his daughter; and the mother, seeing with a quickness only mothers know, had guessed her child's secret, and was ready now to hail this day as the happiest in her life. Had he remained plain Reginald Yorke instead of Lord Bertram of Lisle it would have been just the same, these two would have welcomed him gladly as a son-in-law.

They settled down very easily into their new relations. Reginald had always been Pearl's companion when staying at the Manor, it was no new thing for them to seek each other's company. The colonel brought up some rare old wine at dinner that night and drank the health of the two lovers. Then he shook his head at Pearl and told her she was far too great a child to think of being married, and Pearl smiled in answer; that smile, which her old nurse said, had more of Heaven than earth about it.

The days passed quickly after that—bright, pleasant, halcyon days. Reginald and Pearl spent much of them out of doors, beneath the clear blue sky, among the fragrant flowers, and Lord Bertram tried hard to persuade himself that his wild adoration of Rosamond had been but a fleeting fancy, and that his calm affection for Pearl was the love of his life.

He was gentle and tender with her always, attentive to her slightest wish; mindful before

all else of her pleasure, but yet he was not lover-like; he kissed her on her fair white brow, but there was no more passion in the caress than there had been in those he had given her in her childhood.

When he was away from her it never occurred to him to wonder what she was doing or who was with her. He had been jealous if a man even looked at Rosamond; it never occurred to him to be jealous of Pearl.

He had given her his likeness in a rich gold locket, and she wore it on a chain round her neck. She gave him one of her golden curls, and he treasured it carefully. He had chosen her an engagement ring, very different from the one he had given Rosamond; this was of pure gold, twisted in a coil and bearing inside the inscription, "Faithful unto death." He had forgotten how small and thin her fingers were; the ring dropped off before it was well on.

"What doll's fingers you have, Pearl? I must take this to town and have it altered."

"No, please," raising her white hand entreatingly, "I had rather have it like this. I can twist a bit of cotton round it; I'd rather have the ring. I would indeed."

"But, my dear, it would be just the same only made smaller."

Pearl shook her head.

"It would not be the same thing—I mean to wear it always, Reginald."

He did not tell her as another lover would have done that the ring must soon give place to a plainer one. Reginald liked being engaged to Pearl, he liked to know the gentle girl loved him better than all the world, but he never cared to look forward into the future. He was in no hurry to be married; courtship was very pleasant, he was in no hurry to bring it to a close.

"You will find Pearl a sad housekeeper," Mrs. Ashley said to him one day, laughing; "we have left her a child in everything, I fear."

"There is a regular housekeeper at the Towers," he answered, simply. "I never want Pearl to be troubled by such cares."

Mrs. Ashley looked at him affectionately.

"I never saw anyone like you, Reginald, you are so thoughtful and considerate."

"I want Pearl to be happy, Mrs. Ashley, that is all."

"And to be happy yourself, don't you? Do you know, Reginald, I think you have altered; you haven't half such a hearty laugh as you used to have."

"I am getting old, Mrs. Ashley; I was thirty last birthday."

"And I am fifty-four, and yet I think I am the youngest in heart of the two."

"And yet you have had many sorrows," musingly.

"Yes, we have lost three children one after the other. No one can tell the anxiety we had lest Pearl should follow them; she was such a delicate child."

"She is stronger now."

"Yes, but not so strong as I should like. The doctor told us we ought to take her abroad for the winter."

"In that case you would have to take me too."

"Unless this foreign trip were your wedding tour, and we old people stayed quietly at home."

This brings the date of the marriage into question. Reginald speaks to Pearl, who has no wish but his. Colonel and Mrs. Ashley, however, opine there is no need for delay, and so after some consultations it is decided that on the last day of September these two shall be wed.

"Reginald," said Pearl, one day, when June was nearly over, "a friend of mine is coming to stay with me to-morrow; I hope you won't be vexed."

"Why should I be vexed? Is it anyone I know, Pearl, or not?"

"I don't think you have ever met her. I have only known her two years, but I am very, very fond of her."

Reginald smiled.

"I did not know you went in for young lady friendships, Pearl," a little relieved, as somehow he always was at anything which brought his child-bridal to the level of other people.

"I don't often; but I love Iris dearly. I could not help it."

"That means you tried."

"Oh, no; I did not mean that at all. I hope you will like her, Reginald."

"I'll try my best, Pearl, for your sake. You don't often ask me anything, little one."

"Because," went on Pearl, "we have invited her to stay a month, and it would be so dreadful if you did not like her."

"A month! That is a good long time."

"She has never been able to come before; her mother is an invalid."

For one instant he thought of someone else whose mother was an invalid. Then he scolded himself for his stupidity.

"And her name is Iris?"

"No, not really. Her father gave her that name when she was a little girl, and her sister was Charmion; but since she died the names have dropped out of use. I think I am the only person now who says Iris."

"Pet names stick to people strangely. You will be Pearl all your days, I expect, little lady, although you were christened Marguerite."

"I wish they had called me Daisy instead of Pearl; I like flower names."

"I hate them. What time is 'Iris' coming to-morrow, pray?"

"Directly after lunch. Mamma and I are to drive to the station to meet her."

"Then your father must have had an eye to that arrangement when he invited me to ride to Burton with him to-morrow, so you see I shan't meet your friend till dinner-time."

The next evening two girls sat in Pearl's little dressing-room in eager conversation. In reality there were barely three years between them, but a casual observer would have guessed that Iris was at least five or six years the elder of the two.

The June sunshine shone on the two fair faces. On Pearl in her childish beauty, with the happiness stamped so plainly on her mouth, and on Rosamond Dane in the sweet, subdued loveliness that had gradually come to her since she and her heart's love parted more than six months ago.

Yes, "Iris" was the artist's daughter—Reginald's love and the fair girl he was to marry were bosom friends. Neither guessed the strange link in their fates; neither guessed that both loved the same man. Rosamond had known Reginald three months. She was notoriously a bad correspondent, and she had not written to Pearl once during that period.

Pearl had never cared to talk of Reginald until the day when he asked her to be his wife, lest she should betray to others the secret that she loved him. Since then she had written to Rosamond, but naturally enough she had given her lover his title, and "Lord Bertram" awoke no familiar echo in Miss Dane's heart. So they sat together, little recking that the same man held the heart of each.

Rosamond wore a dress of soft pink muslin, with her namesake roses at her neck and in the coils of her soft hair. Pearl was in white. Very fair and childlike she appeared to-night, and the elder girl, whose heart was sore with her own sorrow, could yet be glad for the perfect happiness that had come to her friend.

"Is Lord Bertram staying here?" she asked, tenderly. "Is that what makes you so happy?"

"I am happy," returned the other, simply. "Only think, Iris, I had loved him all my life, and I thought he only looked on me as a little child friend. I thought so still till the other day."

"And you have known him always, then?"

"Ever since I can remember. For years he lived at the Manor just like a brother."

"I suppose that is the happiest," murmured Rosamond, dreamily, "when two people who know each other thoroughly fall in love. They must have more chance of understanding each other."

"I don't understand Reginald," admitted Pearl. "He is so wise and clever, Iris, I often seem groping after him in the dark."

"But he loves you."

"Yes," with firm conviction, "he loves me. Oh, you are sure to like Reginald, Iris; he is so brave."

Rosamond smiled faintly.

"You did not tell me Lord Bertram's name was Reginald."

"He has a whole string of others, but I always call him Reginald."

"And you will be a peeress. I cannot fancy you Lady Bertram, Pearl."

"Nor I," agreed Pearl. "Do you know, Iris, I think I would rather go on just as we are now and never be married at all. Being engaged is so very pleasant."

"Is it?" doubtfully thinking of her own experience.

"Yes, very. I have Reginald and I have papa and mamma too. Now I shall have to give them up when I am married."

"And it is really to be in September?"

"Yes, the thirtieth. You must come and stay with us at the Towers, Iris, unless," and she leaned her hand lovingly on her friend's shoulder, "you have a little secret of your own and love someone just as I do Reginald. Then I don't expect you would care to go so far away from him."

Rosamond sighed. Pearl was quick to read the change in her face.

"I am so sorry," she cried, in quick contrition. "I have been very cruel. He is dead, and—"

"No, dear," rousing herself by an effort, and for the first time speaking of the past, "last autumn, for a little while, I was just as happy as you are now, only my happiness did not last as I trust yours may."

"You will make it up some day," said Pearl, wistfully. "Lovers quarrels never last."

"This one will last our lives."

They went down to the drawing-room then. Mrs. Ashley was there, but the gentlemen had not appeared. Five minutes later they entered together. The colonel welcomed Rosamond warmly. Then a mist seemed to rise before the girl's eyes as Pearl led up a tall, distinguished-looking man and performed the introduction.

"Iris, this is Lord Bertram. Reginald, Miss Dane."

Reginald murmured something unintelligible. Rosamond bowed; she was the more composed of the two. How she got through the long ordeal of dinner, Rosamond never knew. She was placed in the seat of honour at the colonel's right hand. Pearl was beside her, and Lord Bertram was opposite.

She was conscious of being addressed often, and she strove to render her replies comprehensive; but all the time her thoughts were busy with the grave figure opposite. Had he quite forgotten her? Had he entirely blotted the three months in which she was all the world to him out of his life?

Poor Rosamond! she had thought her cup of sorrow full. She had known for months that Reginald Yorke was lost to her, but now that she saw him at another's side, an accepted suitor, her heart felt nigh to breaking.

What could she do? Invent some excuse to the Ashleys, and return home at once. This would have been easiest to her aching heart, but there were many things against it. Rosamond was very proud. Not for worlds would she have let Reginald discover the agony his desertion had cost her.

In the event of her returning home she would have to allay the surprised curiosity of her parents. Besides—and this reason weighed with her more than all—she must do nothing that could induce Pearl to doubt her lover.

Rosamond was very staunch in her friendships. She loved Pearl Ashley very dearly, and so she resolved to stay boldly on and bear up bravely, rather than her friend should have a single shadow cast on her happy future.

There are some women who, when they have

once decided on a course, rise above all difficulties; such a one was our Rosamond. As soon as she had made up her mind to remain at the Manor, with a marvellous effort she recovered her composure.

She talked, and talked well. She laughed when people were expected to laugh, and when the ladies left the dining-room met Lord Bertram's eyes as unflinchingly as though Mrs. Ashley's home had really witnessed their introduction.

"You are better," said that lady, kindly, when they had reached the drawing-room. "I was afraid you were quite knocked up by your journey."

"It was so very hot," feeling the excuse a lame one.

But she was on her guard now. When the gentlemen returned her composure was unruined. She took her cup from Reginald's hand without a tremble.

"Do sing, Iris," cried Pearl, later on, opening the piano.

It occurred to Rosamond it might be a relief. Her heart was full to overflowing. In singing the story of someone else's sorrows she might, perhaps, forget her own.

"What shall it be?" she asked, carelessly, as she sat down. "Don't trouble, dear," as Pearl began to turn over the contents of the canterbury. "I always sing from memory."

She sang "Looking back," and "Parted," then, at Pearl's request, she sang that saddest of all love songs, "When sparrows build." It was almost beyond her strength, some of the words were so painfully true of herself, for her "old sorrow" had indeed "awoke and cried" on this lovely summer night, and she knew quite well that she and her true love were divided for all time. Not even "when the sea gave up its dead" could they two be to each other what she at once proudly hoped.

"Thank you," said Pearl, when she had finished. "No singing in the world ever touches me as yours does. I feel a great lump in my throat now."

Rosamond laughed awkwardly.

"I am afraid my efforts have not been amusing, dear. Your mamma is actually crying."

"She sings with so much feeling," apologised Mrs. Ashley, "does she not?" appealing to Reginald.

He said something vague about art; Mrs. Ashley decided he was not musical. He went over to Pearl and devoted himself entirely to her. He felt within himself that he needed all the claim she had on him to protect him from the heartless coquette opposite.

Yet all the while he talked to Pearl he was wondering at the change in Rosamond. What had become of all her brilliant colour? Where was her arch smile which had always seemed to him the essence of mirth. She was thinner and graver, and yet what a sweet face she had. He knew now he had never quite forgotten her. Pearl could never fill the void she had left in his heart.

In the spring time his thoughts had lightly turned to thoughts of a second love, but the one passion of his life, the one choice of his heart, had been Rosamond. He watched her, even as he talked to Pearl, and he owned that the months of their separation had but made her more fair to see.

She wore no ring on her shapely hand. What could have become of the man she met secretly in Kensington Gardens who had held her in his arms and kissed her unresisting face? It was Reginald's chancing to witness this meeting and Rosamond's indignant refusal to explain it which had parted them—nothing else.

"And your mamma is better," he heard Mrs. Ashley ask her kindly; "but I am sure of that or she would never have spared you to us."

The colonel was indulging in a nap; the room was virtually divided into two tête-à-têtes. Rosamond may have thought no one could hear her reply but Mrs. Ashley, or, perhaps, now that it could avail her nothing she was willing to give the explanation she once refused.

"Mamma is much better, thank you, but I did not leave her alone. My brother and his wife are helping papa to take care of her."

"Your brother? I never knew you had one, dear, older than you."

"It was very sad," went on Rosamond, still addressing herself to Mrs. Ashley, though her clear voice was audible to the other two. "Papa was very angry at his marriage, and for two whole years we were quite separated from him. Mamma never saw him at all, and I only by stealth."

"You must have missed him very much."

"I managed to see him sometimes. We used to meet in the parks, Kensington Gardens, anywhere; but that is all at an end now. Henry is at home again, and mamma is so happy."

Every word fell distinctly on Lord Bertram's ear. He knew that Rosamond Dane had been true and loyal to him; that angered at his lack of trust she had refused to tell him that the person he had seen with her was her brother. It was just like Rosamond—his loving, wilful, impatient Rosamond.

Oh, why had he never thought of this before? Why had he never guessed the refusal he attributed to conscious guilt arose from wounded pride? He knew the truth too late. What was he to do? He was bound to Pearl. She loved him, poor, innocent child, just as he loved Rosamond.

"It is too late," was the cry of his aching heart, as he sat in the brilliantly lighted drawing-room nursing his sorrow. "My darling was true to me and I doubted her. She was too proud to defend herself I ought to have known. There was truth written in those eyes, and now it is too late. I have put another in her place; I have raised a barrier between us I cannot bridge over."

When Pearl rose to say good-night she discovered Rosamond had already left the room.

"She was so tired," said Mrs. Ashley, kindly. "I don't think she can be strong, for a short journey like this ought not to tire anyone."

"I will go and see her," said Pearl.

But when she went no answer came to her knock at the door, and when she pushed it open she saw Rosamond kneeling by the bed weeping bitterly.

"It was cruel of me to bring her here," thought Pearl, as she crept back to her own room; "but I never guessed she had had such a trouble. Of course, seeing how happy Reginald and I are together makes her contrast her lot with mine. I wonder what her lover was like. How could he leave her?"

CHAPTER III.

A FADED FLOWER.

Sing of the living, not the dead,
Their course is run, their prayers are
said,
Leave them within their narrow bed,
In silence let us leave the dead.

DAYS passed on. Rosamond's visit was a week old. Pearl had ceased to lament her friend's sorrows, for Iris seemed happy; she was the life and soul of the Manor—she rode with the colonel, walked in the flower garden with Mrs. Ashley, sang duets with Pearl, and instinctively did whatever seemed wanting in their little social round of daily duties, only that never by any chance did she address Lord Bertram if she could possibly help it.

These two avoided each other steadily. Pearl wondered at it, but consoled herself by thinking men seldom cared for their betrothed's lady friends, and Iris probably detested the whole sex because one had been faithless to her. No suspicion of the truth came to her; she was blind to the life drama going on under her eyes.

Mrs. Ashley often looked at her daughter anxiously in those summer days, and thought Pearl grew more and more fragile; a misgiving came to her now and then that Lord Bertram's love would be unable to make his young wife's life a long one.

She questioned the girl anxiously, but Pearl

only said she felt quite well, and the doctor whom Mrs. Ashley privately consulted declared there was nothing wrong.

"Miss Ashley is not strong," he admitted, "but you are surely over anxious. Any sudden shock or chill might have dangerous results, but with ordinary care there is no reason she should not live to be quite an old woman."

And with this Mrs. Ashley tried to be content. One day late in July, when Rosamond's visit was drawing to a close. Pearl was to go for a drive with Reginald, she came downstairs ready dressed ten minutes before the time they had named, and she turned into the shrubbery to say good-bye to Rosamond, who had gone there with a book.

To her surprise Reginald was there too; he who had hardly spoken a word to Iris since her arrival was now urging some petition on her with frantic eagerness. Pearl staggered, a sudden faintness seized her; she could go no further. Leaning against a tree for support the sound of voices came to her clearly, wafted on the summer air.

"I have wanted to see you alone," said Reginald, "I have tried for days but you have always avoided me."

"What good could come of our meeting?"

"I wanted to tell you I know all I know how wrong I was—that you were always true to me, Rosamond. I loved you always—I never could forget you quite, hardly though I tried; even when I thought you false my heart was faithful to you, darling."

"Hush," said the girl, "have you forgotten?"

"I have not forgotten, that is why I want to speak to you. In two short months I am to be married," his voice shook, "another must have the name and place I meant for you. Rose, I love you, not her; but for a mistake I should never have spoken to her of marriage; she is dear to me as a sister. You are my life's love, darling. What am I to do?"

"Be true to yourself and to your word," answered Rosamond, bravely. "Pearl loves you; you have no right to make her life miserable because you and I were too proud to agree."

"And you—must I live my life without you?" His very tone told her how bitter it would be.

"I think so," she said firmly. "You and I can bear, we are strong to suffer pain; it would crush Pearl. We must part. Make Pearl happy, only, Reginald," her voice was broken by a sob, "I can't help telling you I loved you through it all—I love you now."

"Good-bye."

They stood face to face. Pearl saw them, a burst of admiration filled her in spite of her own suffering at their generosity—their sacrifice. Then came a long, long blank: she remembered nothing more.

When Pearl came to herself she was on her own bed and her mother and Rosamond were bending over her. The sight of her friend's sweet face brought the scene in the shrubbery back to Pearl; she shuddered.

"Are you so cold, dear?"

After all it was her true-hearted friend, the girl who had refused happiness for her sake. Pearl could not hate her.

"Kiss me, Iris."

They told her presently how a heavy shower of rain had come on; no one had missed her. Reginald supposed she had thought it too wet for driving, the others believed her with him. When she did not appear at lunch they grew alarmed, search had been made and they found her lying on the ground near the shrubbery, wet through and perfectly unconscious.

"I felt a sudden pain, mamma. I suppose I fainted."

"Nothing but an ordinary fainting fit—nothing but a feverish cold, the doctors—and there were two of them—declared; but days passed and weeks, too, and still Pearl was an invalid. Still they said she would soon be better, while she seemed to grow weaker and weaker. Lord Ber-

tram was very gentle to her; her mother nursed her with the love only mothers know, and Rosamond, whom she had begged to stay on till she was better, waited on her assiduously, but in vain.

It was a strange case—there was no disease, so the doctors said, and yet the patient sank instead of rallying. At last it was decided there could be no wedding in September.

"Are you sorry?" she asked Reginald.

"I am sorry for anything that shows you to be ill," was the reply, with his grave, tender smile. "Little Pearl, when will you be well again?"

"I don't know, Reginald; sometimes I think never."

She put her poor tired head on his shoulder. "You must cheer up, little one, tears will never do; you must not talk of never."

"But Reginald, it may be so; I don't think I'd be sorry."

"Pearl, have I made you so unhappy as that?"

"No," with a fond look into his face, "it isn't that."

"What is it, dear?"

"I have been so happy, so very happy, I never could be happier, you know; and if I lived much longer I might be sorry. Life couldn't be all happiness, you know, Reginald."

No, he knew that.

They carried her downstairs day after day—she never walked now, though still they talked of her being better. It dawned on Reginald once or twice how very light his burden grew, but yet he never realised that the fair child who loved him was dying.

The day came round at last that was to have been their wedding-day. They had left off now talking of her ever being well again. Every one at the Manor knew now that the child who had made their happiness would not be with them very long.

There was much sorrow, but no noisy lamentations; their grief seemed too deep for words. Besides, Pearl was so bright and cheerful that, when with her, they never realised how very near the dread angel's coming was.

This wedding-day was made quite a festival of; Pearl willed it so. There was no dinner, but they all had tea in her room. After that she asked to be left alone with Reginald, and they all went out and left her with the man who, had things gone otherways, would now have been her husband.

"You have made me very happy, dear," she said, gently. "Will you do one thing more for me?"

"You know I will, my dear one."

"Lying here," she went on, simply, "I have thought of a great many things. Everything seems clearer to me. You never loved me, dear, as I did you. You looked on me as a dear little playfellow. I think you only asked me to marry you because you guessed my secret. Was it so, Reginald?"

He bowed his head.

"You loved someone else. Was it Rosamond? I think so, because her eyes never meet yours. You loved each other, and first a mistake parted you and then I did."

"Pearl, Pearl! why won't you believe I would do anything in the world for you to get well?"

"I do believe it; but I'm glad I shall not divide you long. Reginald, I never could have given you up if I had lived, I loved you so."

Her head sank back on his shoulder, exhausted with so much speaking. For some time she was silent.

"Let them all come back," she said, at last, "and lay me down first, Reginald."

They came back, father, mother and friend. Pearl gave them each a look of love; then she turned to Rosamond.

"Come quite close, dear; give me your hand, and, Reginald, yours too, please."

With her fragile hand she clasped theirs together.

"Iris, I have not made a will. I have only one legacy to leave, dear, it is Reginald's love. I give all my share of it to you; you'll be very

happy. Don't forget me quite. I loved you both."

They both knelt by the sofa. Mrs. Ashley was sobbing bitterly—the colonel hid his face.

"This was to have been my wedding-day; I should have left you before this. Well, you see I have stayed a little longer. You'll miss me, mamma. Those two must comfort you. How very dark it grows."

"The sun is setting, dear," said Rosamond, from her tears.

"And my life is setting, too. Sunrise will be brighter in Heaven."

Her voice ceased. The last rays of the sun shone on her fair head, shedding a golden glory round it. Her smile had its old sweetness—that sweetness which had more of Heaven than of earth. Well might it have now, for only all that was mortal of Pearl lingered among her friends. The bright, loving spirit had returned to the God who gave it.

When a second winter shed its snows on Pearl's grave, Lord Bertram led his wife down the aisle of Ashley Church. It had been the wish of the colonel and his wife that the two their lost darling had best loved should be married near them.

It was a very simple wedding. No bridesmaids, no company or favours; and yet no bridegroom ever held a deeper joy in his heart than Reginald, no bride ever felt greater content than Rosamond.

Her face had recovered its bloom, but it will never lose the sweet tinge of gravity it learnt during those months of sorrow. United to her first and only love, with years of happiness stretching out before her, her heart feels a pang for the one who loved him as truly as she does. As she walks down the churchyard path she takes a lily from her bridal bouquet and lays it on a snow-wreathed grave. She will never forget that Reginald was given back to her as "Pearl's Legacy."

F. H.

VIOLA HARCOURT;

OR,

PLAYING WITH HEARTS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Evander," "Tempting Fortune," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BLIND.

A WEEK elapsed and still there was no clue to Viola's whereabouts. So well had Miss Agnew and Madame Menzies served Lord Tarlington that they had, as the Indians say, covered up their tracks, so as to mystify everybody. All that could be done was to work and wait.

The greatest difficulty that Sandford Newton had to encounter was to keep Herbert quiet, for he was continually asking about Viola. Now, the doctor had distinctly said that any undue excitement might bring about some further illness which might have a disastrous effect upon his patient, and Sandford was afraid that it would be impossible to keep the matter secret long, for Herbert was getting better and able to sit up in bed.

Mrs. Hobbs, the housekeeper, brought some beef tea to the invalid, who said:

"Will you please tell me the truth about your mistress?"

"I thought you knew, sir," replied Mrs. Hobbs, in confusion.

"I have been informed that she had gone to London on business; but it is strange to me that she should remain away all this time and not say a word to me before going, and not even write to me."

"Yes, sir, it is odd. But I don't know as I ought to say anything."

"Speak out, my good woman," exclaimed Herbert. "You know that your mistress and I are engaged to be married shortly. I shall not forget you if you treat me properly. What is the mystery? I am strong enough to bear anything now."

"Well, sir, if it won't jar your nerves—"

"Don't be afraid. Speak, speak," he said, pressing his hands tightly together under the bed-clothes to conceal his agitation.

"Miss Sutton, sir, went out for a walk with Miss Agnew a week ago to-day, and they haven't been seen since. Mr. Newton has done all he knows to trace them, and we've had detectives here by the score. It's quite the talk of the county; but it's all no use, she's gone."

Herbert Conyers sank back on the pillow, for his worst fears were realised.

"You're not ill, sir?" asked Mrs. Hobbs.

"No, no; just a passing weakness, that's all. Proceed."

"People do say, sir, that she—meaning missis—had no right to the property, and has been and gone and drowned herself, or done something dreadful."

"Nonsense!" Don't talk like that; Miss Sutton is an angel. Begone!" exclaimed Herbert, angrily.

Mrs. Hobbs muttered something which was inaudible, and quitted the apartment, saying aloud, when she got outside the door, just to relieve her feelings, "that she didn't believe Mr. Conyers was any better than Miss Sutton, and she wished the rightful lord was back again."

When Conyers was alone, he got up and dressed himself, though this was directly contrary to the doctor's instructions. When he was attired, he crept downstairs and gained the hall.

Sandford was out, having gone to the post town to ask if the police had any news of the missing lady, only Lucy was at home. She heard footsteps in the hall, and thinking it was her husband returned, she came out of the morning-room to greet him.

Great was her surprise to see a thin, pale man, looking like a ghost, with a hectic flush on his cheek and a feverish gleam in his eye; but strange as he looked she knew it was Herbert Conyers.

"Where are you going, Mr. Conyers?" she asked. "For heaven's sake, be careful."

"I am going after my lost love," he replied. "If the cravens in this house will not find her, I will show that I, at least, am capable of an effort."

Lucy placed her hand on his arm.

"Believe me, Sandford is doing his best," she said.

Herbert laughed scornfully as he shook off her grasp.

"You are all in league against me," he replied. "Let me go."

"Heavens! he is mad," cried Lucy.

Without taking any further notice of her, he rushed into the park and was soon lost to sight. Lucy called the servants, and telling them what had happened sent them to look for him, but it was hours before they found him.

When they did he was lying insensible in a shallow pool of water, into which he had fallen. They brought him back, muttering incoherently, as if the fever had come back again and he was delirious.

When Sandford returned he was deeply grieved to hear of his friend's sudden freak, and sent for the doctor, who shook his head saying that it was a bad case. For days Herbert shook as if with an ague. At length he grew better and calmer, being able to sit up again and talk. Sandford and the doctor were in the room.

"Doctor," said Herbert, "where are you? Come nearer."

"I am close to you," was the reply.

"Draw the curtains. Is it night?" continued Herbert.

The Doctor whispered in Sandford Newton's ear:

"It is as I feared. He caught cold that day

in the park. It has settled in his eyes. Heaven help him; he is blind."

Days glided by with unvarying monotony at The Rosary. Viola was treated with the utmost harshness by the two remorseless women who held her captive, no indignity being spared her. Blows and harsh language were her portion continually, and her time was spent in every menial occupation they could devise, their object being to render her captivity so unbearable that she would sign the document which reduced her to poverty, in order that she might escape from the thralldom in which she was held.

In addition to waiting on Miss Agnew and Madame Menzies, she was compelled to wash dishes and scrub floors, to clean boots and cook dinners. From early morning till late at night she was kept at work, and if she was not expeditious in performing her allotted tasks she was promptly punished and half starved.

Yet so obstinate was her disposition when she knew she was in the right, that she resolutely refused to yield to their demands and suffered in silence, hoping that her friends would find and release her from her hateful bondage and depressing servitude.

Her meekness and obedience only served to enrage the women, who increased their harshness and were continually urging her to sign, but shaking her head she went about her work with a dogged resolution which showed no signs of giving way.

No opportunity of running away was ever afforded her, for either Miss Agnew or Madame Menzies had her continually in sight, standing or sitting by her side, like an Egyptian task-master, lash in hand, when the children of Israel were compelled to make bricks without straw.

At length their patience got exhausted and they plotted together to devise some means of breaking down her resistance, even discussing the advisability of doing her personal violence of a dangerous nature. They would cheerfully have killed her had they dared, but Lord Tarlington had strictly forbidden any recourse to a crime which might have involved them all in serious consequences.

One day Madame Menzies exhibited a dagger and told the unhappy girl that if she did not sign the paper which reduced her to beggary, she would plunge it into her breast. She pointed to the clock on the mantelpiece and gave her ten minutes for consideration; but this did not have the desired effect, for Viola declared that she would sooner die than consent to their wishes. So baffled and discomfited, Madame Menzies gnashed her teeth in impotent rage and had tremblingly to await the course of events.

The delay in the success of their plans caused by Viola's obstinacy was very irritating. The two women were extremely anxious to bring the perilous business they had embarked in to a close, in order that they might claim their reward and enjoy their ill-gotten gains. Delays are proverbially dangerous; Lord Tarlington was becoming anxious. He sent his brother, Fitzharding Sutton, down to The Rosary to urge them to make haste.

From him they learnt of the exertions that Sandford Newton was making in every direction. Perhaps the detectives might find some clue to the girl's hiding-place, and then their scheme would be frustrated entirely. He also told them of the fearful calamity which had befallen Herbert Conyers, who had become, so the doctor said, hopelessly blind.

After Mr. Sutton had taken his departure, Miss Agnew, who was of a cruelly ingenious turn of mind, such as would have graced an agent of the Inquisition, conceived an idea which she thus promulgated in a low tone to Madame Menzies.

Viola was sitting in an embrasure of the window, busily engaged with her needle, having a pile of work before her which she was ordered to finish before she could have anything to eat. She was much thinner and paler; her expressive

countenance was sad, and her eyes red and swollen as if from recent weeping; but there was a firmness in her demeanour, which spoke volumes of her determination to hold out to the last.

"If we cannot attack her by appealing to her own interests," remarked Miss Agnew, "I am of opinion that we can through somebody else."

"I do not quite catch your meaning," replied Madame Menzies.

"Let me explain myself. We will work through the man she loves."

"Ah! Herbert Conyers. Yes. Mr. Sutton informed us that he has met with a terrible misfortune by catching cold in his eyes and becoming blind."

"Precisely. When she knows that she will want to fly to him," continued Miss Agnew. "I know her disposition, for I am a good reader of the character of my own sex, and she is the kind of simpleton who will think it an act of duty on her part to overwhelm him with affectionate devotion. She would endure this sort of life for months and not give up if herself was only to be considered. Shall we try it?"

"By all means," Madame Menzies answered. "It is a capital plan. You talk to me, dear, about Dr. Conyers loud enough for her to hear you."

Miss Agnew raised her voice.

"I am glad that Mr. Sutton came down to-day," she said. "He has given us all the news."

"Yes, indeed, quite a budget. Only fancy Herbert Conyers going blind!" replied Madame Menzies.

"Who would have thought it, indeed? They say he is quite helpless, and that there is no chance of his recovery. Poor fellow! How sad for him to be in a big house like the Hall, with only Mrs. Newton to attend on him and that meddlesome old thing the housekeeper, Mrs. Hobbs, who knows as much about showing sympathy for the sick as a Hottentot. Sandford Newton is away on his detective business. Ha! ha! It's a good joke, his not thinking of looking near home for the lost birdie."

"What will become of Conyers?" inquired Madame Menzies.

"Goodness knows! He has no money. When his wife died her settlement went back to her father. Perhaps he can live at home, though I hear that his father has met with losses recently and is in straitened circumstances. It is a bad job."

"I should not like to lose my sight. Just think of it. Never again will he see the blue sky or the green fields. No more will he gaze upon loved and familiar features. Perhaps he wishes for death. They ought to put him in some asylum."

"No doubt they will," answered Miss Agnew. "He has recovered from his illness and is quite strong again now."

"How did it happen?" inquired Madame Menzies.

"Oh, the thing was simple enough. He heard that Viola had disappeared, and getting up went in search of her, weak as he was. After wandering about the park for hours he fell into some water, and laid there exhausted for hours, not having strength enough to get up. This brought on a relapse. He had a chill, which settled in his eyes. That is all."

Viola had stopped her sewing and was listening with a deep interest, which her countenance sufficiently betrayed.

"Pardon me," she exclaimed, "but are you talking about one very dear to me?"

"We were not addressing our remarks to you," remarked Madame Menzies.

"I am aware of that fact; yet if what you have said is true, and I have no reason to doubt it, I ought to go at once to Mr. Conyers."

"You can go, if you wish to."

Rising from her chair, and letting her work fall to the ground, Viola clapped her hands in childish glee.

"I knew you would not be so hard-hearted," she said, "as to keep me when Herbert wanted me. Can I go at once?"

"In ten minutes, but—"

Madam Menzies paused, and Viola's countenance fell.

"But what?" gasped Viola.

"You must sign the confession."

Clasping her hands, Viola looked the statue of despair.

"Will nothing else content you?" she cried.

"Oh, I thought you had one spark of pity, some remnant of humanity, left in you! Do you know that Mr. Conyers and I are engaged to be married, and that my place is by his side?"

"A very advantageous match it will be for both of you," sneered Miss Agnew. "You will be a pauper and he a blind man."

"No matter. True love does not think that an obstacle to the union of two fond hearts."

"I should have to be very much in love indeed before I could marry a poor blind man. Perhaps you mean to buy him a dog and set him at a crowded street corner, with a placard on his breast bearing the inscription 'Pity the poor blind.' It might be a money-making scheme."

Viola burned with indignation.

"You are a heartless woman to talk to me in that way," she exclaimed; "I will show you the difference between us. Give me a pen; let me sign and go."

Madam Menzies' eyes flashed with a triumph she could not conceal, for she saw that the end she had in view was nearly gained.

"Not so fast," she replied. "You are talking rationally now, and I am very glad that you have come to your senses, for the servitude you underwent here was not altogether pleasing to us or agreeable to yourself; but there is something else to be considered."

"What is that?" Viola demanded, eagerly.

"What a trifling matter of detail. Lord Tarlington has come to the conclusion that your confession will have more weight in a court of law if it is signed before a clergyman and a justice of the peace. There is one near here, and I will send for him; but you must solemnly swear that you will sign it without saying one word to him that we have coerced you."

"I will do anything you wish. Only let me get to Herbert."

"If you break your word and betray us we shall find means to capture you again, and then you will pay the forfeit with your life," said Madam Menzies, threateningly.

"I will not tell the gentleman anything that will prejudice you. Indeed, I will not."

"Say simply that we are your friends, and that your conscience has prompted you to make this confession. When he has witnessed your signature you will be at liberty to depart on the instant."

"Send for him at once," replied Viola.

Madam Menzies lost no time in despatching her servant for the Reverend Mr. Smyley, who was the rector of the parish, a justice of the peace, and an old friend of Lord Tarlington. Half an hour passed. The inmates of The Rosary were all greatly excited and very anxious.

The conspirators were afraid at the last moment that Viola would prove false to her oath; but the poor child could think of no one but Herbert Conyers. She longed to show him that her heart was in the right place. They loved one another for themselves alone.

What was money after all? So much dross. She could be as happy with Bertie blind and poor and living in a garret, as she could if he were in the full possession of his faculties and they had Tarlington Chase with its magnificent income.

She wanted to show him what a noble thing a woman's devotion is. She wished to work for him, and she felt sure that she could earn enough at her trade of a milliner to keep the wolf from the door. It was an unbounded relief to all when the old deaf servant returned with Mr. Smyley.

The reverend gentleman was ushered into the drawing-room where the three ladies were awaiting his appearance. It was then four o'clock in the afternoon, and a drizzling rain had been falling all day, rendering the roads muddy

and causing those who were obliged to be out to feel uncomfortable.

"You have sent for me, madam?" exclaimed Mr. Smyley, who was a grey-haired, elderly man, possibly sixty years of age.

He addressed Madam Menzies as she rose to receive him, and he evidently took her for the lady of the house.

"Yes, sir," she replied. "We have occasion for your services."

"Is there any poor soul sick and standing in need of my ministrations? If so, I shall be glad if you will kindly conduct me to the chamber, and I will offer up a prayer."

"It is in your capacity of a magistrate that we require your services, sir," said Madam Menzies. "You are, I believe, a friend of Lord Tarlington?"

"I have the honour of his lordship's acquaintance."

"Pray be seated. It is, of course, no secret to you that Lord Tarlington has had to give up his property to a young person calling herself the Honourable Miss Sutton."

"Oh, yes. She has lately disappeared from the Hall. There is quite a hue and cry about her."

"Precisely. Allow me to introduce you to—Miss Viola Harcourt."

She indicated Viola by a movement of her hand, and the clergyman bestowed a searching glance at that pale innocent face, the eyes of which were cast down on the carpet.

"I scarcely understand you," said Mr. Smyley. "How can Miss Sutton and Miss Harcourt be one and the same person?"

"Because there has been fraud and forgery."

"Indeed?"

"This person," continued Madam Menzies, "has come to me of her own free will, and after much searching of her inmost soul, she has yielded to the promptings of her conscience, and without any pressure from myself and my friend here, who have treated her with the utmost kindness and consideration, made a full confession."

"Of what, may I ask?"

"Her infamous imposture. But I do not blame her very much as she was the tool in the hands of a designing villain—I mean the late Dr. Newton—who, to gain his revenge upon Lord Tarlington, suborned this young woman—a mere dressmaker's apprentice—to commit perjury."

The Reverend Mr. Smyley threw himself back in his chair.

"Really, you surprise me," he cried. "I can scarcely credit the evidence of my senses, although everyone of my acquaintance said at the time of Lord Tarlington's exposure that there was something very odd about the whole affair."

"So I should think," said Madam Menzies, smiling. "I cannot wonder at your surprise. In fact, if you were utterly incredulous I should not be offended; but allow me to show you the confession that Viola Harcourt has dictated to me. It only awaits her signature, which will be given in your presence."

She went to the bureau and produced the paper which she herself had so skilfully drawn up, and which poor Viola had fought so hard against signing. Mr. Smyley put on his spectacles, and when the document was handed to him, read it with the care it deserved.

"Bless me! A very important paper," he exclaimed. "What wickedness there is in the world! Shall you proceed criminally against this—a—this young person. She richly deserves to be punished."

"No; I should imagine his lordship, who is a charitable man, will think she was, as I have said, a mere tool in the hands of Dr. Newton."

The clergyman spread the paper on the table. This was what Viola was waiting for. Rising, she seized a pen, dipped it in the ink, and boldly wrote her name underneath—"Viola Harcourt."

"Humph!" said Mr. Smyley; "better add, 'Falsely called Sutton.' But no matter," he

added, as Viola threw down the pen as if it burnt her fingers. "I am very much rejoiced, for Lord Tarlington's sake. He was quite a favourite in the county. Very good to the church. Oh, yes! Always very liberal to the charities of the parish. Ah, that is all regular; but let me address one question to the—a—young person."

Viola was standing near the table, with her hands folded over one another.

"Ask her what you like," answered Madam Menzies.

"There is no compulsion about this?" continued Mr. Smyley. "You act freely and independently?"

"I want to go away," replied Viola, with a far-off look in her eyes.

"That's no answer to my question, Miss—a—Miss Harcourt."

"No," exclaimed Viola, in a stern voice. "Can I go now?"

"Certainly, my dear child," answered Madam Menzies, quickly. "I hope you will sleep better now your mind is at rest. What you must have suffered with that heavy load of crime on your breast!"

"Ah! what, indeed?" replied the clergyman, piously.

"We prayed for her, sir, and—why, dear me, the poor creature's gone. She has been so restless. I have pitied her so. Will you keep the document, Mr. Smyley, and please at once communicate with Lord Tarlington."

"I will," said Mr. Smyley, who fell helplessly into the trap set for him.

"We are totally ignorant of his lordship's whereabouts; but as justice has been done by this misguided, erring girl he ought to be made aware of it at once. What a relief it must be to her to have her conscience at rest. If I did anything wrong, I suffer terribly until I have endeavoured to atone for it. Murder will out, they say, and so it is with fraud."

Mr. Smyley willingly undertook the charge of Viola's confession and went away full of importance at the discovery he had made.

Madam Menzies threw herself on a sofa and laughed heartily, Miss Agnew joining in her merriment.

"I think I ought to have been an actress," she remarked.

"How glad I shall be to get back to town!" sighed Miss Agnew.

"Yes, dear," said Madam Menzies. "The country is awfully stupid. Cities are the only places for people of spirit and taste to live in."

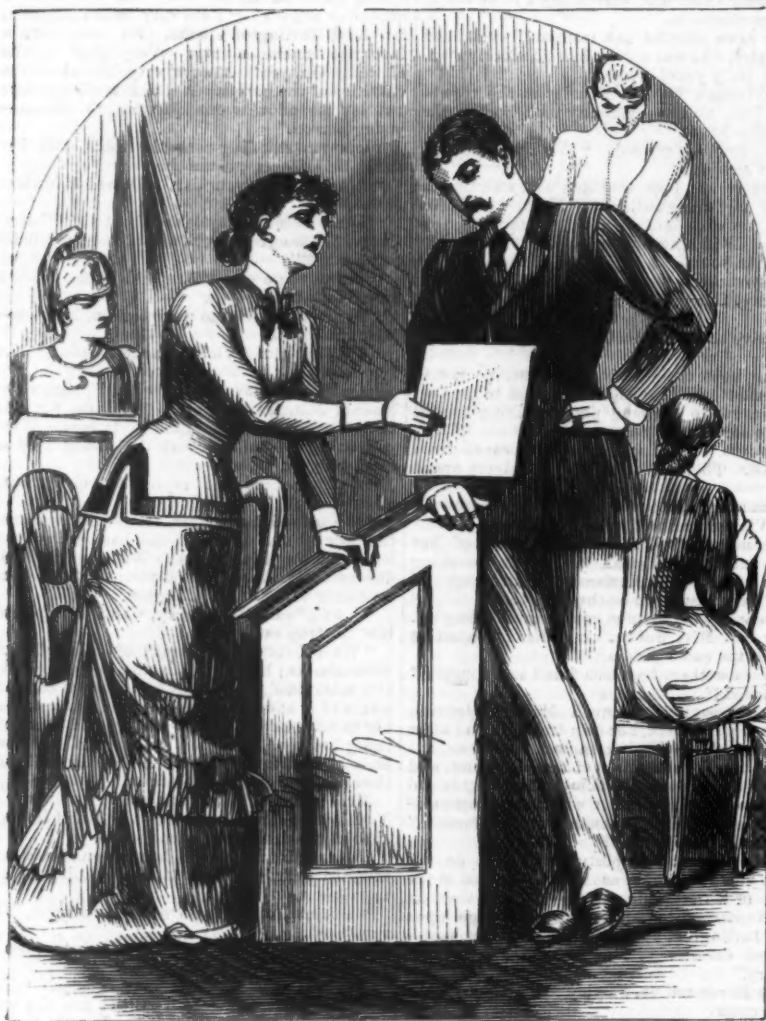
(To be Continued.)

PURPOSELY.

MANY young men and women, too, are utterly without purpose in life. A woman without purpose is as weak as a man without purpose, and as useless. There is in the nature of things no more reason why women should not be self-supporting. Certainly there are enough departments of industry open to women to employ all their capacities and to give them a good maintenance. It is as ignoble for a woman to marry for a living as it is for a man to marry for a living. Marriage is degraded by mercenary motive on either side. When our daughters are brought up to do some one thing well enough to make a living by it, and our sons are trained to some trade or profession upon which they can depend for maintenance, the list of mercenary and unhappy marriages and divorces will be very much less than it is now. It is in the power of parents and teachers to speed the happy day.

In Russia £4,500,000 is being spent for barracks.

It is announced that the Duchess of Connaught expects to add to the already large number of grandchildren belonging to the Queen before many weeks are over.



[MASTER AND PUPIL.]

FORGET-ME-NOTS.

In a sky-lit room, on a winter morning, a group of art-students were steadily pursuing their work. It was a long, narrow room. The floor was bare, the desks were battered, and the walls dingy.

It was no luxurious centre for luxurious dilettante evidently, but a retreat for work, and the young men and women gathered there were workers. Leaning against the blackboard at the end of the apartment, looking in the distance like a blonde silhouette, stood Julian Palmer, the master.

A thoughtful, somewhat melancholy look rested on his young, handsome face as his critical eyes repeated their survey of his class. There was a cast of the Apollo Belvidere beside him, but do not think I am going to compare Julian Palmer to Apollo.

That graceful, slim-limbed, low-browed young god isn't fit to hold a candle to our muscular nineteenth-century hero, with his square shoulders, nervous hands, close-cropped hair, and arrogant golden-hazel eyes.

Suddenly in the quiet, at the remote end of the long narrow room, one of the pupils rose in her place and held at arm's length a large plaque, upon which was painted a bunch of forget-me-nots.

There was a curtain of coarse jute behind her,

against which her figure stood relieved, suggesting—in this atmosphere of suggestion—a Diana with a shield. A pleased animation stole over young Palmer's melancholy face as Diana turned her eyes calmly to his, and he moved slowly down the room to where she stood.

He had been thinking why and how he was here, of how hard it was to fight the wolf, and endure the drudgery, but suddenly as he started down the room he forgot it. Julian Palmer was a genius. His grandmother, who brought him up and left him her little fortune, was sure of it.

The district schoolteachers who had contributed to his education were sure of it; and, if truth must be told, Palmer was pretty sure of it himself. After his grandmother's death, when he was nearly twenty-one, he went to Rome.

There he made his little inheritance support him for four years. He passed those years in hard study—producing, destroying, striving; starving his body often to feed his soul; and when they were ended and his money gone, he had his art-training, his fine ideals, and his unpractical habits, to bring home by way of capital.

Pardon me, Julian, you had one gift more—a personal fascination—which counts in the equation. Palmer during these years had never mistrusted his capital but once. That was on the stifling August morning when he stepped

from the steamer's plank and went wandering along the Liverpool docks in pursuit of breakfast.

He was a stranger in Liverpool—a stranger, for that matter, in his native land. His velvet cap and coat and flowing hair might have commanded respect in Italy, but only ridicule here.

He had not over three pounds in his pockets, and a few squares of canvas, which held his colour dreams, under his arm. The scorching pavements, the fierce light, the squalor, the smells, sickened and disheartened him. He felt that he was about to fail.

A young girl was watering some dusty geraniums up in a balcony. She glanced down at the handsome, shabby young fellow who looked so tired and ill, and her face filled with pity—more because he was so handsome than because he was so ill. Palmer caught her eye and touched his hat wearily.

"Can I get some breakfast here, my good girl?"

He was used to flattering looks from women. "Yes, sir. I will wait upon you. Walk in."

He turned into the shop below the balcony. The flies were buzzing merrily over the blue fly-netting which covered the loaves of bread. A comfortable matron behind the counter was tying up parcels.

"Breakfast, please," said our wayfarer.

She motioned him on, and at the end of the shop, standing between some clean muslin curtains, he saw his friend from the balcony, beckoning. He entered a small room with four tables, and a lattice opening at the end, over which a vine was growing, took his seat, and picked up a newspaper.

The girl spread a little white cloth over the painted table, and without any orders brought presently a pot of coffee, a plate of bread and butter, and a bunch of radishes. She could divine that her pale, handsome customer had no money to pay for luxuries. When he had eaten, Palmer sat still, almost studiously. By-and-bye the mother came in from the shop.

"Would the gentleman have anything more?"

He roused from his abstraction.

"Pardon, madam; I have just reached my native land after years of absence. I have been so absorbed all the while in study that I have forgotten to retain my place here at home. I come back, and remember suddenly that I have no friends. It is a little painful. But I shall rectify my blunder."

He rose to go, taking out his purse. The girl whispered to her mother:

"Do not charge him anything, he has eaten so little."

"Let the account stand, sir," said the woman, sympathetically. "By-and-bye you will require some dinner, and a lodging may be to-night, which I can furnish you. It is a bad time to get work, I am sorry to tell you."

"I am a painter. I have some pictures to sell," he said, with a faint smile. "I am going to see some artists and dealers. You must allow me to pay for my breakfast."

The girl sighed faintly.

"Ah, he was a gentleman, in spite of his shabby clothes. She might have known it. He would never come back. What a pleasure it had been to serve him with his breakfast."

"There is a Jew in the next street who deals in pictures," said the mother. "We had those of him—for five shillings, frames and all," pointing to two chromos representing a man and a woman with duplicate double chins and startlingly fresh complexions.

Julian Palmer smiled again, more wearily than ever. The women followed him to the door. A few hours later he was standing before his picture of the Pontine marshes, in a cool, luxurious studio. He had mounted the canvas, placed it upon an easel in a favourable light, and was waiting the arrival of one of the proprietors to pronounce judgment upon it.

His work did not disappoint him as it stood

there surrounded by works which had earned fame. There was the golden Italian atmosphere, some distant ruins white in the sunlight, and the stretch of marsh in the shadow, desolate and dreary and fascinating.

Mr. Kranz, the proprietor of the studio, came in by-and-bye. At this season, he said, no one was even looking at pictures. The times were bad. Nothing sold except by name. Mr. Palmer was welcome to leave the picture—which had its merits—on exhibition, but as to an advance—they never did any business in that way.

He was turning away—a portly, prosperous man with much business on his hands, anxious to get through in time to take an early train to his country place, when something in the artist's face arrested him. He was used to artists, to their straits and their arrogance and their desperations, but this one had an unusual look to his practised eye.

"By the way," he said, with a glance at several open letters in his hand, "tell me something of your situation, Mr. Palmer. I have a letter here from a friend in a distant city, telling me that a suitable person might organise an art-class in the place—a sort of school of design in a small way. Would that come within your range?"

"I might even peddle chromos, if it was proposed to me," said the young man, bitterly. Like all dreamers, he had reached a waking-up time, and resented it.

"You will understand," said the proprietor, rather stiffly, "that the place I speak of is one which there are plenty anxious to fill. Something about you, Mr. Palmer, attracts me, and yet I hesitate to recommend a person of whom I am entirely ignorant."

"I see," said the artist, "it is requisite to have friends and character. I have neither," with tragical quiet in his tone. "I need not detain you."

"Look here, my good fellow, I am out of patience with you, but nevertheless I like you. Could you manage this school of design, as my correspondent calls it? And will you give me your word to reflect no dishonour upon my recommendation, in case—"

Palmer shrugged his shoulders reluctantly. His companion was amused by his obstinacy.

"Then you do not care for the position?"

"Pardon. Work means life. But—I am not particular about living."

"Nonsense!" Mr. Kranz glanced at the artist, then again at his work, and then at his watch. "We shall have time to catch the three-o'clock train. Mr. Palmer, I wish you to go home to dinner with me. This evening we will talk over your affairs."

And in consequence of this momentary and good-natured impulse on the part of Mr. Kranz it transpired that during September an art-class, organised by Julian Palmer, was opened in the town of E—, composed of carpet-weavers and mechanics of both sexes, two students from an adjoining seminary, and one fine lady.

It is hardly fair, either, to call Irene Gray a find lady, because that means something dainty and artificial, which she was not. She was fair, like a Diana, standing in her place that winter morning, holding out her plaque, with its bunch of forget-me-nots. She was tall, slightly round-shouldered, but the stoop added, some way, to her grace. She had a small, well-set head, a mass of shining brown hair, a fair skin, and penetrating dark blue eyes with black lashes. A slight frown contracted her brows as she examined her work. Her lips were set impatiently together.

At that moment Palmer reached her side. With his smiling lips, his arrogant eyes, and well-kempt golden air, he was quite another being from the weary voyager who strolled into the coffee-house that August morning. And Jasper Gray's only daughter was quite another person from the little girl who watered her crispest radishes for his breakfast. Yet into Irene's eyes came the shy, tender look. Whence did Julian Palmer get his power over men and women? And was he fit to wield it?

"It is finished, then, Miss Gray," he said. "You have done very well. I shall miss you from your place. I suppose you will not care to continue your lessons?"

"No. I have no further excuse for coming. My holiday presents are all prepared now. Thanks to you, Mr. Palmer, they are quite satisfactory."

"Yes; you have taste for decoration. The golden-rod on the satin glove-box, the sea-sketch in the shell, the two plaques—all very nice. But not art, Miss Gray."

"What do you call art?" she asked, dreamily. "Only that which one does because of their consuming desire to do it—into which they merge hope and fear."

"Is art, then, all to you, Mr. Palmer?" She looked with the direct pathos peculiar to her eyes right into his, so suddenly that he betrayed his soul to her.

"It ought to be. It was," he stammered, "I am glad it is not now," she said, softly; "because I don't believe that art alone is enough, after all."

"It is not, Irene. I have learned that it is not," with reckless intensity.

She started slightly, seeming not able to withdraw her eyes from his—perhaps she was only not willing.

"Are you going?" he asked.

"Yes, when you have promised to dine with us. Father wished me to ask you, and, moreover, I am going to ask a favour of you."

"A favour. It is granted before you can ask it."

"Then I will ask two."

"Two? My life is not rich enough to hold two favours for you, Miss Irene."

"You do not know how rich it is—if friendship can enrich it," she said, impulsively.

They looked at each other silently for a moment.

"I must go now," she said, softly, beginning to gather her belongings.

"At what hour shall I come?"

Who could have imagined such passionate submission in Julian Palmer's eyes; such humility in his tone.

"We dine, as you know, at five. I shall be at home after four."

She dropped her eyes, inclined her head gravely, she knew that a revelation had come to each of them, and went away.

It was half-past four, and the twentieth of December. A grey air with the tang of snow in it outside, and dusk within. Irene Gray sat alone in the parlour. Her little feet in their bronze slippers and the train of her dark silk dress with its white lace trimmings lay upon the Turkish rug before the fire, and the glow of the red coals made the rings on her hands throb and sparkle.

"Am I too early?" Palmer asked, as he was shown in.

"No," she said, simply, rising and giving him her hand. "Don't you like the dark? It seems so full of Christmas mysteries."

"Ah, you like mysteries. Do you know, I thought you did not."

"Why?"

"Your eyes are so steady and penetrating. You are altogether so candid."

She started at that, and looked at him searchingly.

"Are you curious to know what are the favours I am going to ask?" she said.

"I am impatient to grant them, because—"

"Why because, Mr. Palmer?"

"Because they may seem to lead the way to a favour I wish to beg from you."

"From me?"

"What a surprised tone, Irene. But you cannot be ignorant of what lies in your power to grant. Are you ignorant of what it is in my heart to ask?"

"Tell me," in her soft, grave tone.

"May I?"

He drew his chair closer to hers, resting his hand lightly across the back, and speaking close to her ear:

"Your love, Irene? Am I too bold, too hasty. Pardon me. I cannot wait. Do not imagine that I forget the difference in our stations. You are rich, and I am poor. But I love you—I love you. That is my only excuse. Can you forgive me for loving you, my darling?"

"It comes so soon," she said, musingly.

"Soon? Haven't we met for three months every day? Hasn't our joint work revealed us to one another more in that time than ordinary social intercourse ever does? Soon? Why, it seems as if I had lived a long, blissful lifetime since that late September day when you came to me with the bunch of forget-me-nots, and asked me if I would teach you to paint them. Ah, Irene, you painted yourself and them upon my heart in that first interview, before I dreamed that you were rich and well born, and every way above me. But to you of course the occasion was commonplace. You merely wanted a teacher to help you in preparing some pretty knickknacks for the holidays. I can understand that I am nothing to you."

She stretched her white hand with its glittering rings towards him.

"Mr. Palmer—you—"

Her face turned up to his flushed with fire-light. His arm, resting upon her chair-back, slipped down around her. With his other hand he grasped hers stretched towards him, and so in the dusky twilight he drew her toward him.

"Yes, I—I love you. And you—"

"I love you," she whispered.

Mr. Gray's step was heard in the hall as they sat in the silence that followed their confession. Palmer rose.

"I shall tell your father at once, Irene."

"Ah, my father. It will be so hard for him to know," with a little shudder.

It was hard—there was no disputing that—for Jasper Gray to know that his queenly girl had thrown away her heart, as he put it, on a beggarly artist. Mr. Gray, it chanced, was the correspondent who had suggested to Mr. Kranz the feasibility of establishing in E— a school of design, moved thereto by the wants of some ambitious carpet weavers among his constituents. And here his philanthropy, like a bird of ill-omen, had come home to roost. He used some strong words.

"If Irene's mother had lived," he averred, "it would not have happened."

And again, as often before, he felt himself aggrieved and wronged by the early death of the mother whom Irene so much resembled.

"You have forgotten all about the favours you were to grant me," Irene said, archly, later in the evening, when Mr. Gray was writing letters for the late mail.

"There can be no question of favours. All that I can do for you it is yours to command," said Palmer.

"Ah, you are so docile! This is the time for my suggestion. I have been thinking of some plans for Christmas, something to give others pleasure. You know our art-class. What can be harder than to be so appreciative and ambitious as some of them are, and to lead such dull, vulgar lives as they have to? To love art," she went on as Palmer began to smile, "and yet to live in stuffy little rooms with cabbage boiling and children crying. But you understand, I want to help our art-class to a pleasant Christmas. Now here is my idea. Let us get together and trim the room with evergreens, and then meet there and exchange Christmas gifts. The gifts, you know, will consist of work done in the class. Think how I should like one of those clay hands that John Fenner modelled—from yours—for a paper rest; or one of those beautiful patterns which Marsh designs, for my Kensington needle-work. There isn't one of the class but could give me something precious. Ah, the memories of that art-class are so dear!"

Palmer pressed her hand.

"After exchanging the gifts, it is my idea to arrange some tableaux. There is the platform for a stage, and the jute curtain, and the Apollo, and lots of things to make it look scenic. And

for this I propose to charge an admission fee, and devote the proceeds to increasing the models and all that. Isn't it a nice plan?"

"But where is the favour, Irene?"

"Oh, your consent and co-operation."

"As if I should not be happy to help you."

"You are so good. I was afraid you might think it was foolish."

"There was another favour, I believe? I suspect you gave me the sugar first; now comes the pill."

Irene hesitated, and spoke with some reluctance.

"There is a girl in whom I am interested. I have been interested in her a good many years. She is very handsome and very gifted—and rather peculiar. I had her at boarding-school with me. In fact we have been like sisters. She would live here, but papa dislikes her—it seems so strange that anyone can dislike Helen. A year ago an aunt of mine, whose only daughter had died, wanted to adopt Helen, and she went there to live. But one of my aunt's sons has become so infatuated with her that Aunt Horton will not keep her. Poor Helen! she cares nothing for Cousin Albert. It is not her fault. But the sequel is, she is homeless. I propose to bring her here to E—, and I want you to take her under your training for the next three months. She is half actress, half poet, half artist by nature. See, for my sake, what training will do for her—what vocation is possible for her."

"Shall I be a proper judge, Irene?"

"Yes, I think so," Irene replied, slowly.

Somehow this plan for Helen's advantage, that had been for a fortnight in her mind, seemed to fill her of a sudden with misgivings. It was too late, however, to retract, and having settled affairs for others as she had planned, the girl felt free to yield to the rapture of her own new experience.

It lacked a few minutes to seven o'clock on Christmas Eve when Julian Palmer unlocked and entered his class-room and lighted the lamps. The long room, heavily hung with evergreens, and now blazing with light, was transformed. In the centre of the floor stood a large round table piled with packages. Each of the ten members of the art-class had contributed some trifle of their work to each other member.

Irene had not made her gifts any more costly than the others were to be. Palmer drew from his pocket a tiny parcel and deposited it with the rest. How surprised Irene would be. What a pleasure to gratify her. A week previous he had received a letter from Mr. Kranz—the first one—informing the artist that his picture of "Marshes near Rome" had sold for a hundred pounds, which he had the pleasure of enclosing with no deduction for commission.

Palmer had held his peace as to his stroke of luck, and immediately invested a third of the sum in a ring for Irene. The design was a cluster of forget-me-nots in sapphires and diamonds. This was contained in the little box he had drawn from his pocket. He had another gift for her also—a tile on which a few strokes represented the interior of a long narrow room, with a curtain at the extreme end, and against this a tall girlish form holding at arm's length a plaque, on which in miniature outline could be traced some blue forget-me-nots.

The artist sat there, in the solitude, rapt in thought. His talent was burning at its best; his pictures were selling; his reputation was coming. He had won the love of a woman who had every quality to desire. He admitted that fate was kind. And yet there was no contentment.

Alone there in the green-hung room, on that Christmas Eve, he dreamed of higher achievements, more brilliant fame, more satiating bliss. Then he hated himself for his discontent. He tried to be satisfied. But who is ever satisfied by trying?

The time was approaching for the arrival of his pupils and guests. He struggled to throw himself into the spirit of the occasion. How much trouble Irene had taken. How noble and

good and true she was. Was ever a man so blessed as he in the woman he had won?

There were footsteps on the stairs shortly, and the members of the art-class began to arrive. There was no stiffness or constraint, for, spite of social differences, these people had common tastes and were at ease together. They waited till seven o'clock for Irene, when a hasty note was received from her.

"Helen's train was delayed. She has just arrived. I shall require every minute to prepare her for her part in the tableaux. Distribute the gifts, keep my precious parcels safe for me, and be sure that the seats are arranged by quarter to eight."

Irene.

Palmer was vexed. The "gift enterprise," as he called it, was rather a bore without Irene. These tableaux had absorbed her so that he had hardly seen her for two days. He had a twinge of jealousy on account of this girl Helen. He did not approve of Irene's intimacy with a person whom her father would not tolerate and whom her aunt discarded.

However, he was master of ceremonies, whether or no, and he was forced into action. The parcels were distributed, the seats arranged, and at eight o'clock the audience filled the room in every part.

Palmer announced the tableaux:

"I. Christmas Eve. Two scenes."

The curtain rose. It was a nursery scene. Children hanging up their stockings. Very pretty and—commonplace. The audience applauded. After some delay, the curtain rose again. This time there was a breathless hush, a shudder of admiration and surprise at the scene.

There was a painted scene for background representing the front of a large, handsome house. In an upper window there were lights, and through the half-drawn curtains were seen the same white-robed children hanging up their stockings.

Then the stage represented a street swathed in cotton batting to produce the effect of snow, while bits of white paper slowly falling completed the pretty deception. But on the sidewalk, upon the snow, knelt a figure upon whom every eye turned.

It was a girl dressed in a soiled, tawdry evening dress, shrouded in her long black hair, in which were tangled some faded flowers. Her neck and arms, more beautiful than marble, were bare. Her face was upturned to the lighted window, her hands raised in supplication. And as she knelt there, the snow, light, silent, pitiless, drifted down and down upon her.

There was a tumult of admiration as the curtain fell, and Palmer hastened behind the scenes to congratulate Irene. She was so busy in rearranging Helen's hair for another scene that she could scarcely speak to him, except to ask him, exultingly:

"Didn't she look beautiful?"

"She did indeed," Palmer answered.

He thought in truth he had never looked upon a more beautiful being.

"Helen dear, this is Mr. Palmer, whom you have heard so much about."

Helen raised her brilliant black eyes slowly.

"You have stolen my Irene from me," she said, pettishly. "How are you going to make me amends?"

"Time will tell, Miss Helen," replied Julian, carelessly.

The girl's voluptuous, imperious beauty attracted and repelled him at once. He hurried back to the hall.

"What ails you?" asked Irene, a little later, when her lover came behind the scenes a second time to apologise for a blunder he had made in announcing the wrong tableau.

"Irene, I am beside myself. I have an uncontrollable inspiration. I must begin a picture at once."

"Ah," laughed the girl, "you want to paint Helen. I knew how it would be."

"Yes, I want to paint her, just as you posed her. A street scene—the lighted windows, the fallen snow, and this girl kneeling—"

"Very well, Mr. Artist, you shall begin to-morrow, before your inspiration fades."

"Irene, forgive me, but I must begin to-night. For the first time in my life I have a desire for figure painting. I have never put my best work in anything but landscapes, you know. You'll not mind, Irene? I will get Marsh to take my place and announce the tableaux, and you will let me off to my work while the spirit moves?"

A troubled, wistful look came into Irene's eyes.

"You cannot have Helen to-night."

"Certainly not. I shall not need her for a day or two. I shall require but two or three sittings, any way."

"That's what it is to have an artist lover," Irene said to Helen, after Julian had gone.

"Yes, it is to play second fiddle. I wouldn't believe in a man's love who looked at another woman as your lover looked at me."

"But I do believe in him, you see, dear. I trust him utterly," Irene answered, in her sweet, serious way. "Hasn't he a noble face and honest eyes?"

"Yes, he is handsome, Helen said, shortly.

Why should Irene have all the good gifts of life, and she so few? she wondered, bitterly.

"She has set her heart upon this man," she reflected. "If he should play her false and make her suffer, then our lots would be more equal."

Poor Helen, from her childhood up she had never lost sight of her jealousy of Irene Gray. For the first time there came to her a hint of the possibility of dragging Irene to her own level of suspicion and discontent.

She went on and played her evening's part, but she did not forget the absorbed, rapturous look with which Palmer had devoured her face and form. All that Christmas day Palmer was locked in his studio. That was his intense way of working.

He had forgotten to give Irene her picture of her ring. She thought he had neglected to provide ever so simple a gift, and it hurt her, especially when no word of appreciation came for the beautiful slippers and smoking-cap she sent him on Christmas morning. On the afternoon of the third day she had a note from him.

"Please send Helen to my studio for an hour," was its contents.

"Come, Helen, we will go to Mr. Palmer's studio," she said.

He had not said for her to bring Helen, but to send her. Irene's face was graver than common as she greeted her lover.

"Will it disturb you if I come in, Julian?"

"Oh, I daresay not," he answered, absently.

That was all he had to say to her after secluding himself for three days.

"You want Helen to kneel?"

"Yes, I am ready to sketch in her figure. I think I'll not stay. I'm afraid it will hinder you."

"Forgive me, dear Irene," said the artist, suddenly. "You see how absorbed I am in my work. This is always the way when the spell is upon me."

He did not ask her to remain. Before she was fairly out of the door he was posturing his model. What a wonderful model she was—the repose of marble without a trace of rigidity. He worked on almost breathlessly. No one who had not seen him at work could dream of the fire and fascination of his beauty.

"Please lift your eyes to that point," he indicated, speaking for the first time. Then rousing himself he found that it was growing dusky. "Are you tired?" he asked.

"Not of looking at you," said the girl, abruptly.

"I meant of posturing."

"Yes, I am tired of that. I am foolish to do it for you."

"I hope you will not refuse to sit for me a few times more."

"I can't tell how I may feel towards you."

"But you have no reason to feel unkindly."

He had a favour to gain, and he approached her with a sort of reverence.

"What would you do for me?" she inquired, curiously.

"Anything you will ask of me."

"Very well. Come home with me this evening, and try to amuse me as long as I have been sitting for you."

"That is no hardship. In fact, I should grasp your expression better if I was more accustomed to your face."

"But Irene, she will expect you to pass the evening with her."

"I will explain it."

"I am not willing you should say I asked you to come with me. She would not like it."

Palmer hesitated. Surely whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.

"Very well," he responded. "I will put it upon the grounds of my work. The need of studying your features."

Helen was wrapping herself in Irene's India shawl. She might have been Cleopatra, with her oval face, her brilliant oriental eyes, her thin, wide nostrils and full red lips. She put her warm hand into Palmer's, which was cold with excitement and exhaustion.

"Come," she said. And he went.

On New Year's morning, once more in his sober senses, for his work had passed the conceptive stage and was secure, he went humbly to Irene. He meant to have a thorough explanation, take her to his studio to see his picture, and re-enter upon his happy betrothal relation.

But Irene was some way not an easy person to whom to explain things. She met him with her sweet gravity, which rippled, for all its sweetness, over rocks of pride. She made no reproaches, expressed no surprise, and was so severely conventional that she baffled him. After a while she said, quite casually:

"No, I think I will not look at the picture till it is finished. While I am in London you can devote yourself to it without interruption, at least until your art-class begins again. And when I get home, it will be done."

"London! I did not know you were going to London, Irene."

"I always go with father to spend January. We start to-morrow."

The parlours were filled that evening with callers who came to say good-bye; for although Julian Palmer did not know that Mr. Gray and his daughter left for London on the morrow, he was about the only person in E— ignorant of the fact.

Irene was engrossed with the duties of hostess, and Palmer chafed inwardly at her neglect of himself.

"She thinks she has taken a poor devil of an artist, and can treat him as cavalierly as she will," was his reflection.

He left early. On his way home he had to pass Helen's boarding-place. She was standing in the doorway.

"Come in a moment, I want to hear about the festivities at the great house."

"Why weren't you there?" asked Palmer.

"Mr. Gray disapproves of me. Would you like to know why?"

"It would be rather interesting to know on what grounds anyone could disapprove of you."

"He thinks—it sounds absurd—that I set my cap for him."

"Oh!"

Palmer experienced a kind of disgust.

"Yes, it is quite a story. And—I don't mind telling you that it is true."

"Why do you tell me? I had rather you did not."

"I first thought I would take that way of getting even with Irene, by marrying her father. But now I think I shall take another way."

"I should think Mr. Gray was an unsuitable husband for a girl of your age."

"Well, I don't know, an old man's darling is better than a young man's slave. I shocked him by showing my hand too soon. He forbade Irene to bring me to his house. All the same he thinks of me. Some day he will come back and sue for me, if I wait."

"Why do you tell me these things, Helen?"

"Go home," she said, pushing him towards the door, "and guess why."

Palmer obeyed her. He could not drive the thought of her from his head. He sat, late into the New Year night, imagining her in different scenes. His fancy gloated over splendid colouring, her magnificent outlines. He felt the glamour of her brilliant eyes. Suddenly he started. A cold perspiration broke from his pores.

"Am I falling in love with her?" he cried out to himself; and he could not answer the question.

Irene's letters from London were just like her sweet, serious self. There was no sting in their coolness, but cool they were, nevertheless, and Palmer, absorbed in his work, answered them indifferently.

All the same, he was wretched. He felt that he had forfeited Irene; that she sooner or later would break the engagement, and he appreciated and loved her as he had not begun to do before.

When the last touch was put to his canvas and his picture was done, he fell ill with brain fever. He was delirious for several days, during which time he knew that Helen moved about his room and took care of his wants. He saw her indistinctly as through a veil, statueque and resplendent in a trailing purple gown, dropping his medicines, stirring his gruels. Would Irene have done this? When he came weakly back to consciousness Helen sat dumb, unbetraying, in his sight.

"You have done everything for me. I have known it," he said, weakly.

"Yes, I have done for you what no other woman would. And for what?"

"I am grateful, Helen."

"Gratitude! I scorn it. If I was as rich as Irene Gray, you would feel something more than gratitude."

"I have no right to feel more than gratitude," he said, humbly.

"You will have the right to feel as you please soon."

"What do you mean?"

"It is said that Irene has a favoured lover in London. Trust me, you will be asked to release her. I don't think it would kill you to do so."

Palmer was silent. Ah, Irene was cold and scrupulous, it was true. If he could have seen the faint compression of the proud lips harder day by day, the weary shadows deepening under the sweet eyes, the languor, the heart-sickness of Irene's face, he would have judged her differently. Helen was getting her hat and shawl.

"Now that you are conscious and convalescent I cannot stay," she said.

"Oh, stay, Helen; it is so dreary to lie here alone."

"That is like your sex. You will accept all my devotion, and then fling me aside like a worn-out glove."

"Helen, you wrong me."

"Well, what would you do?"

Things grew dark and giddy before Julian's eyes. It was so dreadful to lose her presence.

"Heaven help me!" he gasped. "I will love you only too well."

"Love me." She came to the bedside and leaned over and kissed him. "You speak falsely!" she said, passionately. "It is I who love you. You do not care for me."

He caught her hands and held them hard for all his weakness.

"I do," he said.

A week elapsed. No letters from London. No word of sympathy except from Helen. Palmer was on his feet at last, weak, shattered from the strain of his work and the rack of his feelings. His destiny was settled. He was going to marry Helen, to lose himself for ever from this happy, hopeful lot which had opened before him; he was going, he said to himself, to Satan. And what matter? Helen, with

her baneful beauty and cruel will, was dominating his life. It was she who had decided their course.

The night came for the decisive step. They were to meet at the station for the midnight express. On reaching London they were to be married, and take passage at once for America. Up to the last Palmer had made no preparations for departure. Excepting his new picture and his valise, he had no luggage; but from a sort of habit—the habit of a wanderer—he was passing during the last moments through his room, opening boxes and drawers.

Suddenly he paused. A faint perfume greeted his senses; from between the leaves of a notebook fell a bunch of faded forget-me-nots. It was like the crisis of a disease—the tearing away of a mask. His true love came back and clothed him, and Helen, the woman to whom he was about allying himself for life—he loathed her.

He stood holding the forget-me-nots—those that Irene had brought in her hand in that first interview. The clock struck. The hour was come. Palmer folded the flowers in a bit of tissue paper, and laid them against his heart; then, knowing nothing of what he would say or how explain, he went to bid Helen good-bye for ever.

She was walking the platform when he reached the station, leaning on a gentleman's arm. Palmer approached, perceiving with surprise that her escort was Jasper Gray. Helen turned defiantly with a brilliant smile upon him.

"Let me introduce you to my husband, Julian. Mr. Gray and I were married at eight this evening, and are going direct to London."

Palmer stammered something. His first thought was, would she tell? His second, there is one to whom I, at any rate, should tell all. I do not dream of forgiveness, but she must know.

Two years later, in his studio, Palmer had arranged a little reception for his friends and patrons, and an exhibition of his two-years' work. He had sent a card of invitation to Irene Gray—his first venture of communication since the interview in which he had told her all his falsity and meanness and delirium.

And that evening she came. Her beauty had grown a trifle colder and prouder, that was all the change. She wore a black velvet costume, and at her throat a bunch of forget-me-nots. Palmer was greatly changed. His arrogant beauty and fine colouring were gone; sad-eyed, anxious, spiritual, he was more the ideal artist than ever before.

"Your works praise you, Julian."

It was Irene speaking in her tender, quiet tone.

"That is all the reward I ask—your approbation. If I dared, I might say your forgiveness, but I dare not."

"Forgiveness is of the Lord and conscience," she said.

"The forgiveness I want is from the woman I wronged so horribly and all the while loved so devotedly," he returned.

"She forgives you, Julian," said Irene, sadly.

"Not with the forgiveness which permits hope. It is a dead and buried forgiveness you grant me, Irene."

She unfastened the forget-me-nots at her throat, put them into Palmer's thin hand, and glided gently away. Palmer's brain reeled. He watched her going. Suddenly he started in pursuit.

"You cannot leave me so," detaining her at the door, grasping her gloved hand. And she suffered him to detain her. W. H. P.

A new company has been started in Paris to supply better cabs. The vehicles are painted with tricolour borders, and the rugs of the drivers are the same.

CONTENTS.

| Page. | Page. |
|---|--|
| CECIL'S FORTUNE ... 25 | FORGET-ME-NOTS ... 44 |
| HINDOO WORKS ... 28 | CORRESPONDENCE ... 48 |
| A STRATAGEM ... 28 | |
| MISCELLANEOUS ... 28 | |
| PAINT ... 28 | |
| A CLOSE IMITATION ... 32 | No. |
| LOST THROUGH GOLD; OR, A BEAUTIFUL SHEER ... 29 | LOST THROUGH GOLD commenced in ... 874 |
| FACTS ... 33 | VIOLA HARCOURT; OR, PLAYING WITH HEARTS, commenced in ... 876 |
| TIME'S REVENGE; OR, FOILED AT THE LAST PEARL'S LEGACY; OR, TWO WOMEN'S LOVE (COMPLETE) ... 37 | TIME'S REVENGE; OR, FOILED AT THE LAST, commenced in ... 881 |
| VIOLA HARCOURT; OR, PLAYING WITH HEARTS ... 41 | CECIL'S FORTUNE commenced in ... 886 |
| PURPOSELY ... 43 | |

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

VIOLA.—1. See answer to "Weary Henrietta," in our Reader dated May 1. 2. Glycerine, diluted with rose-water, will whiten and soften the skin.

A LOVING SISTER.—1. The stepfather is in the same position as the father of the boy, therefore it is incumbent on him to contribute to the support of the boy till he is of age. 2. Although separated by mutual consent, the wife does not forfeit her legal claims on the property of the deceased husband. 3. We believe the wife can leave by will to any person property acquired by her own industry subsequent to the separation.

EIGHTEEN YEARS' READER.—Apply to the secretary of one of the shipping companies. Their names and offices are in the "London Directory."

ANNIE M.—1. We do not believe in the "learned astrologer," or any such rubbish. 2. To sleep soundly for ten hours every night is not a sign of good health; eight hours is ample. 3. A vertical indented line between the eyebrows is brought about by a habit of contracting when in deep thought. 4. No doubt the right man will appear presently.

J. C.—To promote the growth of the hair, see answer to "E. G. F." in No. 838.

KNARESBORO' CASTLE.—1. We do not think the value of the crown piece would exceed five shillings. 2. The black specks on the face are living insects, and can be extracted by pressing the orifice of a small key over them.

AMY No. 2 & 3.—Yes, consult the solicitor who advised you in the first instance.

MACBETH.—If you consider you have the requisite qualifications to adopt the stage as a profession you should "interview" one of the theatrical managers or agents, who will gauge your talent. There are hundreds of young men who, thinking they had professional ability, have tried the stage, and regret that they ever turned their attention to it.

S. G. S.—For cleansing the teeth see valuable and simple receipt "Dentifrice," under heading "Household Treasures," in No. 878. See also article "How to Keep Teeth Clean and Healthful," in No. 880.

PUBLICO.—Do not believe it. A man without money is certainly poor, but a man with nothing but money is still poorer. Worldly gifts cannot bear up the spirits from fainting and sighing when trials and troubles come, or toothache by a chain of pearls. Earthly riches are full of real poverty.

P. W. B.—The legal control of a father over his son ends when the latter comes of age, which is when he has attained his twenty-first year. After that he has no power to interfere with the actions of his children, they being henceforth responsible to society for their doings.

CATHERINE.—Accustom your children to a strict attention to truth, even in the most minute particulars. If a thing happened at one window, and in describing it they say that it happened at another, do not let it pass, but instantly check them, for you do not know where deviation from truth will end.

ALICE M.—Wait until the gentleman is formally introduced to you. If he is really impressed he will soon procure admission into your circle of acquaintances. Keep out of his way for a little while. Do not let him think you are fishing for a husband. Remember, men are very suspicious.

ALFRED K.—In ancient geography the provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia were called Dacia, and the Turkish empire in Europe Thracia and Macedonia, so that the followers of Mahomet are treading on classic ground. Like their brethren, the Mongols in India and China, they are invaders; and as we know what is the fate of all races that refuse to amalgamate with the people among whom they settle, there will be nothing extraordinary in the expulsion of the Turks from Europe.

SUSAN.—It is difficult for us, who know nothing of the peculiarities of your situation, or of your husband's education, tastes, and disposition, to advise you in such a matter. Try and manage to make home the most pleasant place in the world to him, and then perhaps he will come to it more eagerly than to any other place.

EDITH and AUSTIN, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Edith is nineteen, tall, dark hair and eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of music. Austin is nineteen, fond of home, brown hair, blue eyes.

CONSTANCE, seventeen, dark, loving, would like to correspond with a gentleman between twenty and twenty-five, fair, medium height.

JESSIE, eighteen, brown hair, grey eyes, would like to correspond with a young gentleman of a loving disposition.

DORA and ANNIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen. Dora is twenty-three, dark, fond of home and children. Annie is eighteen, fond of music and dancing.

MOLLY, twenty-one, medium height, domesticated, dark, would like to correspond with a gentleman with a view to matrimony.

ANHELIA C., medium height, dark, would like to correspond with a seaman in the Royal Navy. Respondent must be about twenty-seven.

FANST and MAY, two friends, wish to correspond with two gentlemen. Fanny is twenty-two, dark hair, blue eyes, fond of home and children. May is twenty-three, medium height, of a loving disposition, fair, thoroughly domesticated, and fond of home. Respondents must be about twenty-four, loving, fair.

ALICE and CLARA, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. Alice is twenty-five, blue eyes, tall, fair, loving. Clara is twenty-four, medium height, fond of home and children, brown hair, hazel eyes.

I ABIDE BY THY DECISION.

I abide by thy decision,
Be it for the best or worst;
Such a soul could never lightly
Banish one to woes accursed.
There must be some settled reason
For thy strange and dire decree,
Unto which thou dost prove inconsistent,
Though it make a wreck of me.

Yes, I feel, without the knowing,
That this principle is true,
Pure and sacred as an angel's,
For it emanates from you.
So I'll trust thy cool discretion
Rather than my passion's zeal,
And to all thy will and orders
I subscribe, and kiss the seal.

Still, all human judgment's erring,
And the best apparent course
Often leads one far from justice
Into realms that breed remorse.
Many years of peace and pleasure
Off result from frocks of folly,
While the sternest creeds engender
Everlasting melancholy.

Let the limpid floods of passion
Melt thy reason's flow of ice,
That our ships of life sail gently
Onward after sacrifice.

Let the streaming tears of sorrow
Be as rain upon the earth,
Calling back the buried flowers,
Giving all a newer birth.

I'll abide by thy decision
If thou still canst deem it best;
Such a soul could never lightly
Rob of love so fond a breast.
There was sure some settled reason
For the dread decree you gave,
Still I feel it's in thy power
Yet to love me and to save.

W. D.

A. S., H. F., and H. J., three friends, would like to correspond with three young men. A. S. is twenty, tall, fair. H. F. is twenty-three. H. J. is nineteen. Respondents must be about twenty-seven, good-looking.

LOUISE and ANITA, two friends, would like to correspond with two tall, dark gentlemen. Louise is eighteen, hazel eyes, good-looking. Anita is seventeen, medium height, fair.

C. C. and R. E. would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. C. C. is nineteen, of a loving disposition, fair, domesticated. Rose is twenty, fair, fond of music and dancing.

NELLY and EDITH, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. Nelly is eighteen, fair, good-looking, tall. Edith is seventeen, medium height, fond of music. Respondents must be tall, dark, good-looking.

LOW DIET and EXPECTING FULL, two seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with two young ladies. Low Diet is twenty-two, tall, fair, hazel eyes, fond of home. Expecting Full is twenty-three, dark, fond of dancing.

TIN HAT, twenty-one, a seaman in the Royal Navy, dark, curly hair, medium height, good-looking, fond of children.

AMY and BERTHA, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen. Amy is nineteen, good-looking, fond of home and children, dark hair and eyes. Bertha is seventeen, loving, light hair, dark eyes, good-looking, fond of music and children.

LETA and IVY, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Leta is twenty, medium height, dark, good-looking. Ivy is eighteen, tall, dark hair and eyes.

POLLY, twenty, dark, would like to correspond with a tradesman about twenty-four.

JANE and BECCA, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Joannie is twenty-five, medium height, domesticated, dark, fond of music. Becca is twenty, good-looking, tall, fair, thoroughly domesticated. Respondents must be good-looking, fond of home.

ROBERT M., nineteen, would like to correspond with a young lady about the same age, fair, light hair, medium height, fond of home.

ETHEL and DOLLY, two friends, wish to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Ethel is twenty-two, light brown hair, dark blue eyes, fair, fond of home, of a loving disposition. Dolly is twenty-three, tall, dark, black hair, blue eyes, fond of home and music.

MALLER, twenty-one, auburn hair, fair, medium height, good-looking, with a view to matrimony. Respondent must be about twenty-seven.

M. D. and D. L., two friends, wish to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. M. D. is twenty-four, dark, fond of dancing. D. L. is twenty-one, fond of home.

A. J. C., eighteen, good-looking, medium height, would like to correspond with a young lady about the same age.

LOUISE and ALICE, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Louise is twenty-two, dark, fond of dancing. Alice is twenty, good-tempered, fair, and fond of music and dancing.

PHYLLIS, twenty, hazel eyes, loving, medium height, fond of home, would like to correspond with a gentleman about twenty-one, of a loving disposition, dark, tall, fond of music, good-looking.

EMMA, MAGGIE, and ANNIE, three friends, would like to correspond with three young men. Emma is twenty, medium height, brown hair, dark eyes, fond of home. Maggie is twenty-two, light hair, blue eyes. Annie is twenty-two, tall, dark hair, grey eyes, good-tempered. Respondents must be steady.

MAY, LIL, and KATE, three friends, would like to correspond with three seamen in the Royal Navy. May is fair, fond of dancing. Lily is twenty, medium height, thoroughly domesticated. Kate is fond of home, dark, curly hair, grey eyes.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

CARMEN by—Lonely, twenty-six, tall, fair, fond of home and music.

G. B. by—Alice Maud V., nineteen, of a loving disposition, blue eyes.

CHARLIE by—Emmie, twenty, medium height, good-looking, fair.

HARRY by—Annie, nineteen, tall, fair, fond of music and dancing.

W. M. by—Bessie, twenty, fair, brown hair, blue eyes.

GRACE by—Respondent.

CHARNELL GEORGE by—E. B., nineteen, medium height, fair, fond of music, of a loving disposition.

SAMUEL GEORGE by—Maud, sixteen, tall, good-looking, fair, fond of music and dancing.

E. G. A. by—Annie, twenty, medium height, fair, dark brown hair, hazel eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children.

PET OF THE MESS by—Annie, tall, fair, good-looking, of a loving disposition.

LILY by—B. H., twenty-one, dark hair, fond of home and music.

W. D. by—Robert, eighteen, tall, fair, of a loving disposition.

LILY by—Hugh, nineteen, tall, dark.

ALL THE BACK NUMBERS, Parts, and Volumes of THE LONDON READER are in print, and may be had at the Office, 334, Strand; or will be sent to any part of the United Kingdom Post Free for Three-halfpence, Eightpence, and Five Shillings and Eightpence each.

THE LONDON READER, Post Free, Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

LIVE and FASHION, Vols. 1 to 2, Price Seven Shillings and Sixpence each.

EVERYBODY'S JOURNAL, Parts 1 to 4, Price Threepence each.

Now Ready, Vol. XXXIII. of THE LONDON READER, Price 4s. 6d.

Also the TITLE and INDEX to Vol. XXXIII., Price One Penny.

NOTICE.—Part 210 (May) Now Ready, Price Sixpence, Post Free, Eightpence.

N.B.—Correspondents must Address their Letters to the Editor of THE LONDON READER, 334, Strand, W.C.

†† We cannot undertake to return Rejected Manuscripts. As they are sent to us voluntarily authors should retain copies.

London: Published for the Proprietors at 334, Strand, by A. SMITH & CO.